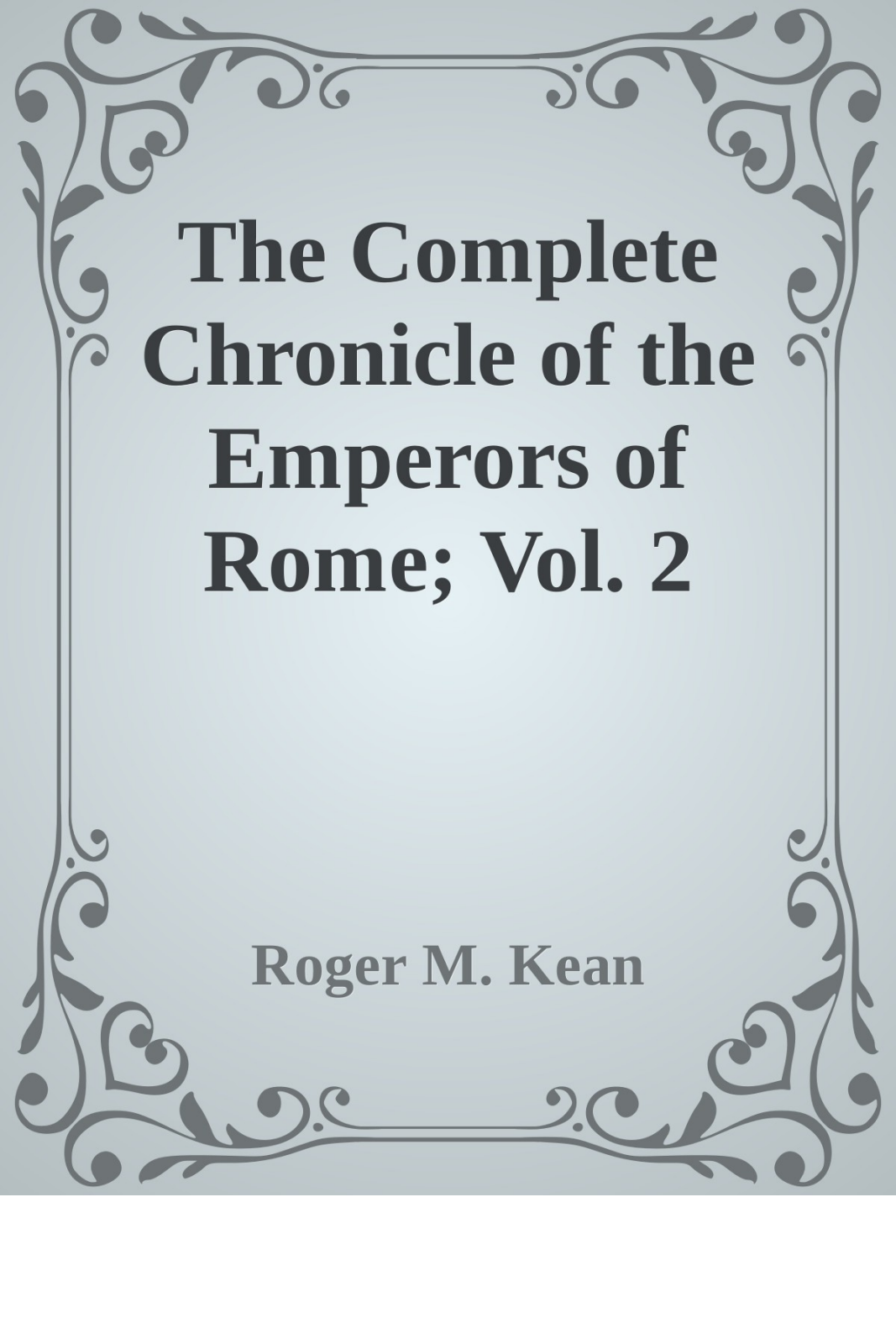


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Roger M. Kean

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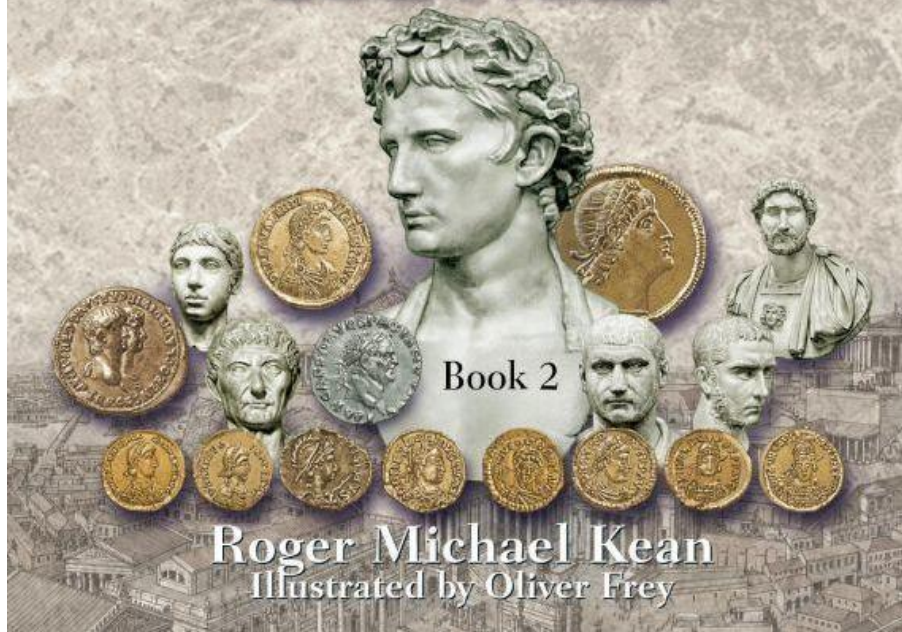
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THE COMPLETE CHRONICLE OF THE EMPERORS OF ROME

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**THE
COMPLETE CHRONICLE
OF THE
EMPERORS
OF
ROME**

Volume 2

ROGER M. KEAN

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THE TETRARCHY

[AD 284–313]

Diocletian

Valerius Diocles / Gaius Aurelius Valerius Diocletianus

[Augustus November 20, 284 to May 1, 305 abdicated; died December 3, 311]

Maximian

Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus

[Caesar summer 285; co-Augustus April 1, 286 to May 1, 305 abdicated; reinstated November 306 to November 308 to July 310]

In a reign spanning more than twenty-one years, Diocletian altered the course of the Roman empire beyond recognition. Not only did he convincingly end the phase known as the Military Anarchy, his reforms also laid the foundations for the way the empire would be governed from this time on, and ultimately secured its continuity in the East for more than a thousand years. This state of affairs did not come about through harboring any sentiment toward past tradition or custom. Indeed, Diocletian completed the process begun over three hundred years earlier by Augustus, of consolidating absolute power in the hands of one man and then delegating portions of responsibility to a few hand-picked subordinates who reported only to the emperor. From this point in history, the role of the senate was reduced to that of a (sometimes) useful body of consultants; to be treated courteously, listened to when the advice made sense, but otherwise ignored.

Valerius Diocles was born in about 245 on the coast of Dalmatia, possibly at Salonae (Solin) or nearby Spalatum (Split). Modern historians use Salonae and Spalatum interchangeably, but they were distinct in Roman times. Of low birth, in childhood he would have received little formal education, which makes his later achievements all the more astonishing. He had a wife Prisca and a daughter Valeria. As a native of Illyricum he had easy access to a military life and, in the newly democratized army, a path to the higher echelons of command. Although he owed his promotion to his undoubted military abilities, he seems to have had misgivings about his merit as a strategist, and frequently left the tougher planning decisions to his generals. As Diocletian rose through the ranks, his prudent decisions as an officer appear to have been concerned with victory rather than

personal glory. Under Carus he found favor with the emperor and was appointed to the rank of *comes domesticorum*. In 283 he served as a consul.

The forty-year-old who won the battle on the Margus in July 285 would now emerge as a complex mix of attributes: clever politician, cunning manipulator, able administrator, passionate architect, by turns clement and harsh—a set of characteristics best summed up as “fair but cruel.” He adopted an unexpected kindness toward the officials who had held posts under Carinus, and reconfirmed their appointments. He even went so far as to step into the consulship left vacant by Carinus and share it with Aristobulus, who had been Carinus’s colleague of choice.

Diocletian was faced with many problems. The reunified empire was far from secure, internally or externally. The chief obstacle to the maintenance of imperial unity was the ever-present possibility of military revolts. While these threatened, no real progress was possible in securing the frontiers from barbarian invasion, let alone attending to an urgently required reform of the government, which was his long-term goal. If military revolts were to be avoided, it meant that the emperor would have to assume command in all major campaigns, thus denying generals victories that might induce their troops to proclaim them.

This policy of imperial mobility, which lay at the heart of everything Diocletian did, predicated two innovations. Rome was too far removed from the regions of military activity, and so could no longer feature as the administrative center, and if the emperor was forever on the move, the court must be mobile too. The place of the resident court officials, the *Palatium*, situated in the Palatine palace, was taken by a “traveling staff” of the emperor’s companions (his *comitatus*). Diocletian was a practical statesman and he understood that an omnipresent emperor could not deliver the level of action required to achieve his aims. He had no son to whom he could depute some of the duties while maintaining overall command, and so he followed the precedent set by Nerva of appointing a worthy colleague as his partner.

His choice fell on Maximianus, an Illyrian officer born in about 249–50 at Sirmium and a close friend some five years his junior. In character Maximianus was the opposite of Diocletian; while the latter was a shrewd statesman, the former was typical of his countrymen, uncultured and often brutal, but a superb strategist and manipulator

of men. The emperor was therefore able to entrust command of the frontiers into the hands of an expert, while taking comfort that their deep-rooted friendship would prove a safeguard against a possible usurpation. Diocletian appointed Maximianus Caesar in the summer of 285, and he adopted the names of Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maximianus (Maximian). To further emphasize the nature of their relationship, Diocletian assumed the title of *Jovius* and gave the title of *Herculius* to Maximian, for Jove was the father of the gods, the supreme controller, while Hercules was the god of the earth. Diocletian now moved his peripatetic court to Nicomedia (Izmit, Turkey), from which he issued forth on military assignments when his presence was required, while Maximian took command of the western provinces, making Mediolanum (Milan) his capital.

Maximian's first priority was Gaul, which had fallen prey to barbarian raids across the Rhine as a consequence of Carinus's severe depletion of troops in 284. The reduced garrisons had also allowed the Bagaudae, a roving band of brigands under the leadership of chiefs Aelianus and Amandus, to cause widespread damage throughout the province. The revolt had closed the roads connecting to the frontier and so needed to be subdued with urgency. Maximian found these rebels a difficult challenge because they adopted guerrilla tactics to which his soldiers were unaccustomed. However, the rebels were suppressed by the spring of 286 and his troops proclaimed him Augustus on the first day of April. This was exactly the kind of situation Diocletian had hoped to avoid, but he wisely acceded to the men's' claim and, by recognizing Maximian as co-emperor, he prevented any discord. Edicts were now issued in their joint names, but Maximian's reverence of his friend's intellect meant that Diocletian retained supreme power over the legislation. There was no division of the empire between the two Augusti, and although Diocletian normally resided at Nicomedia and Maximian at Mediolanum, both campaigned far from their headquarters as the occasion demanded.

Enter the Franks

In the two years from 286 Maximian restored order along the upper Rhine, which was not a simple task. An alliance of Alamanni and Burgundi had crossed the river at numerous points between its source and Moguntiacum. Although the incursions appeared too vast to encompass, the Romans were aided by the devastated, barren countryside. Famine decimated the barbarians' numbers and plague reduced them further. The outcome was a number of skirmishes during which Maximian acquired prisoners for his eventual triumph in Treveri (as Augusta Treverorum was now generally known), after which the remnant fled across the Rhine and fell into a civil war. Along the lower Rhine the Franks had found new allies among the Heruli Goths and Chaibones, a warrior-people from the distant parts of eastern Transrhenane Germania. Maximian was able to split the allies and defeated the Chaibones near Colonia Agrippina (Cologne), before crossing the Rhine to fight the Franks. In a great battle on the river's east shore his praetorian prefect, a vigorous man in his thirties called Gaius Flavius Valerius Constantius, won Maximian a great victory. At this point Gennobaudes, one of the Frankish chieftains, proposed a treaty. In return for being named king of the Franks and protected by Rome in his authority, he and his warriors would swear allegiance to the empire. Thus, in 288, the first ever barbarian client kingdom was set up as a buffer state on the northern frontier.

The Gallic coast had become a haven for Saxon and Frankish sea-pirates in the latter years of the Imperium Gallorum. To deal with the problem, Maximian established a base at Gesoriacum (Boulogne). Modern Boulogne in France and Bologna in Italy both derive their names from the same Latin word "Bononia"—Bononia Gesoriacum in Gaul and Bononia Felsina in Italy. The location is usually referred to simply as Gesoriacum to avoid confusion. However, chaos was the result of Maximian's appointment of Carausius to Gesoriacum's command of operations. An experienced sailor, Carausius was a native of Menapia (the region that lies between the modern Rhine and Scheldt estuaries). This appointment was based on an uncharacteristically poor judgment of character. Carausius's efforts met with immediate success, but instead of turning over the booty to the provincial authorities, he used it to enlarge his fleet and power base. Instead of destroying the pirates' ships, he claimed them for himself and enlisted the sea-raiders to man them.

On hearing of Carausius's disobedience, Maximian ordered his

execution, but the proscription was leaked. To protect his own interests Carausius proclaimed himself Augustus and slipped across to Britain with all his ships in 287. Maximian ordered the fitting out of a punitive fleet, but bad weather and poor seamanship brought it to disaster. Having established his authority in Britain, Carausius was able to return to Gaul and recover Gesoriacum. He extended his hold along the coast and made an alliance with the Franks of the Low Country. For the time being Maximian and Diocletian were obliged to acknowledge Carausius's power, which—either as a snub or a peace offering—he proudly proclaimed on his coins that showed him as the third Augustus alongside his “colleagues.”

In 289–90 Maximian faced another uprising of the Alamanni, who had crossed the upper Danube into Raetia. This time, encumbered by other disruptions, Maximian required Diocletian to assist in their ejection. In the two years following, Maximian led punitive expeditions into Alamanni territory, which quieted them for several years.

Meanwhile, Diocletian spent much of his time sandwiched between the lower Danube and the eastern provinces. While he was in Syria in 288, he took advantage of Vahram II's continuing internal strife and tidied up the situation left by Numerian's abrupt evacuation of Persia. An Arsacid, Tiridates III, was placed on Armenia's throne, returning the country to the Roman sphere of influence. Further, Diocletian compelled Vahram to give up his claims on Mesopotamia. On the lower Danube, Diocletian prosecuted two successful wars against the Sarmatae in 289 and 292, and subjugated an invasion of Saracens in Syria in 290. In 291 he was needed in Egypt on the upper Nile to put down another rebellion of the Blemmyes.

Creation of the Tetrarchy

After about eight years' experience of rule, much of it spent warring in widely spaced theaters, Diocletian was becoming convinced that the constitutional arrangements he had made in 285 were inadequate to govern the modern Roman empire. It was clear that two rulers could not be expected to meet all the demands made of them, and the failure to dislodge Carausius was a direct consequence of their lack of administrative resources. Accordingly he decided to apply mitosis to the imperial cell by appointing two Caesars to help the Augusti. Since Diocletian had no sons and Maximian's son Maxentius, aged about ten, was far too young, the adoption of non-family members was repeated in dual ceremonies held simultaneously in Mediolanum and Nicomedia on March 1, 293. Diocletian nominated one of his staff officers, Gaius Galerius Valerius, who adopted the name Maximianus, thereby further strengthening the ties between the two Augusti, and Maximian nominated his praetorian prefect Constantius.

Diocletian wished to enforce the unity of what became known as the tetrarchy (rule by four) through inter-marriage as well as adoption. It is not clear whether Constantius had already married Theodora, Maximian's stepdaughter, or whether he put aside his mistress Helena in order to marry Theodora at this time. By Helena he had a twenty-year-old son called Constantinus (Constantine). Galerius was compelled to divorce his wife in order to marry Diocletian's daughter, Valeria. Because of his slightly greater age (about forty-three at the time), the Augusti made Constantius the senior of the two Caesars, and each respectively had conferred on them the titles of *Jovius* and *Herculius*. With this collegiate board of rulers, Diocletian had dissolved the problem of constitutional succession that had so plagued the principate. In theory, each Augustus would abdicate as he reached the appropriate age for retirement, and his adoptive-nominate Caesar would take his place as Augustus, in turn immediately nominating his own Caesar. In theory it was a stable political system and it had the advantage that each new Augustus would first gain experience of government as a Caesar. Nor were the two new Caesars limited in their *imperium*, as Maximian had been in 285. They were given an equal share in the *tribunicia potestas*, were allowed to issue coinage in all their names, and shared in the honorific titles and any victory won by any of the tetrarchs.

Finally, each tetrarch was entrusted with approximately one quarter of the empire to rule. Diocletian assumed responsibility for the

eastern provinces including Egypt, Maximian received Italy, Germania Inferior and Superior, and the provinces of Africa and Spain. To the Caesars, Galerius was assigned the Balkans as far as the Oenus (River Inn) in the west, and Constantius received Gaul and Britain. There was no legal definition of these assignments, which were largely based on expediency, and the two Augusti were free to enter either of the two Caesars' territories when required.

With Gaul and Britain in his realm, it fell to Constantius to subjugate Carausius; in preparation, he promptly left Mediolanum and established his capital at Treveri. The first phase was designed to drive Carausius out of Gesoriacum and away from the Gallic coast, and for this purpose Constantius had flotillas built on all the rivers of the region, which issued from the estuaries and attacked the outlying enemy ships. The tactic succeeded in its principal aim, but failed to draw out Carausius's main fleet, which went into hiding behind the bulk of Vectis (Isle of Wight). Wisely, Constantius refrained from undertaking a seaborne invasion until he was better prepared, and turned instead on Gesoriacum. In 293 the city was besieged and finally fell after the Romans constructed a barrage across the harbor mouth to prevent any relief reaching it from Britain. Constantius then attacked northward across the low-lying coastal plain of Belgica, driving Carausius's Frankish allies back into their forest domains. For this failure, Carausius lost his authority in Britain and fell victim to an assassination plot orchestrated by his chief minister Allectus, who assumed the usurped title of Augustus in his place.

The restoration of Britain to the Roman empire was delayed for another three years while Constantius made his preparations for an invasion. When it came in 296, retribution against Allectus was swift. Two fleets were used, one under Constantius sailed from Gesoriacum, the other under his praetorian prefect Asclepiodotus from the Sequana (Seine) estuary. The British fleet stationed in the sound between Vectis and the mainland was rendered ineffective because of thick fog, in which Asclepiodotus slipped past to land at Clausentium (Bitterne). Allectus, who did not know that the fleet of Constantius was approaching his capital of Londinium along the Tamesis (Thames), marched south to meet Asclepiodotus, but was defeated and killed. Constantius arrived in time to prevent the destruction of Londinium by renegade detachments of Allectus's army and, with the taking of the city, the province of Britain was fully restored to Rome.

In previously driving back the Franks from their alliance with

Carausius, Constantius had captured many prisoners. He treated them in a similar manner to the way Maximian had Gennobaudes, and by granting them land on the island of the Batavians (the region of south Holland), he established a Frankish tribe, the Salii, who would have a profound impact on the events of the sixth century. As Allies, the Salian Franks served Rome under the command of the governor of Germania Inferior. Thus, through the diplomatic efforts of Maximian and Constantius, the Franks were bound—for the time being—to the empire through settlement and treaties, and Roman authority was firmly re-established in Gaul. The Alamanni, on the other hand, were not so easily placated. In 298 a band raiding some forty miles from the Rhine in Germania Superior attacked Constantius and his bodyguard. He was only saved by reaching a fortified town in the nick of time, and then in a counterattack was lightly wounded. Infuriated, the Caesar drove the Alamanni back across the river.

Problems in the East

Between 293–96, Galerius was successful in his provinces along the Danube, developing the region's economic and agricultural life while engaging in several frontier wars with the Marcomanni and Sarmatae. And then in 297 Diocletian appointed him commander-in-chief of the army detailed for war with Persia, and Maximian took over from Galerius in Illyricum. Among the Augustus's achievements was a defeat of that ancient foe the Carpi that was so complete the tribe was erased from the list of barbarian invaders. In the following year Maximian campaigned in North Africa against a Berber confederation the Romans called the Quinquegetani (five peoples) that had broken through the Numidian frontier. The war was swift and successful, and Maximian returned to Italy to visit Rome for the first time in his reign.

The causes of the looming war against the Sassanid Persians had its roots in 293, when the unhappy reign of Vahram II ended with his death and the coronation of his son Vahram III. The son found it even harder to secure united support for his rule, and he was overthrown after only four months by Narses, a man more in Shapur's mold. Diocletian had already spoken of the "hostile Persian nation" in 296, the year that a Sassanian army entered Armenia and threw out the Roman client king Tiridates III installed by Diocletian eight years earlier. Narses declared war on Rome and began an advance on Syria. Galerius moved to oppose him, but the war opened disastrously for the Romans. Either through poor intelligence or because he underestimated the enemy, Galerius took insufficient forces with him as he crossed the Euphrates at Nicephorium (also Callinicum, now Raqqa). Between there and Carrhae (Harran) the two armies met, and the Sassanians won a great victory. Mesopotamia fell again into Sassanid hands. Ancient sources say that Diocletian was so angry at this defeat that he publicly humiliated Galerius by making him run beside his chariot for a mile.

His own sense of failure was probably punishment enough for Galerius, who hastened to make good his reputation. In the following year (298), reinforced with detachments taken from Illyricum, he routed the Sassanians from Armenia, taking a huge booty that included the royal harem. Narses was so anxious to recover his possessions that he sued for peace. Galerius demurred, but Diocletian overrode the Caesar's wishes and made a treaty favorable to Rome. Not only was the province of Mesopotamia returned, it was extended north to the Tigris, and the client kingdom of Armenia was also

extended to include the Caucasian Iberia. Further, merchants trading between the two empires were obliged to use the road that passed through the Roman garrison town of Nisibis, where they had to pay customs duties. The peace thus established was to last for forty years.

One other event of importance occurred in Diocletian's sphere of influence, one that was to have sweeping consequences for both the army and provincial government. It was probably in the summer of the same year that Narses overran Armenia—perhaps even taken as an example—that a certain Lucius Domitius Domitianus had himself proclaimed Augustus at Alexandria. However, the historical sources refer to the usurper as Aurelius Achilleus, yet the coins he issued from the Alexandrian mint are the physical evidence for Domitianus, inscribed *Imp. C. Lvcivs Domitivs Domitianvs Avg.* This suggests that there were in fact two different usurpers. The coinage extends over two years corresponding to Diocletian's twelfth and thirteenth years of reign, 296 and 297. But Diocletian only arrived in Egypt early in 298 and suppressed the rebellion by putting the usurper Achilleus to death. We must, therefore, suppose that Domitianus either died of natural causes or was killed by his successor in the summer of 297.

Whatever the motive for this revolt, Diocletian viewed it as a nationalist rising that proved any weakening of central government could have fatal consequences. He determined on a radical series of changes to the way the empire would in future be organized and governed. As Septimius Severus had once done with Britain and Syria, the emperor planned on further dividing provinces into smaller units, the better to avoid large states within the empire falling into the hands of ambitious governors. He was to go much further than Severus.

Reforms of the Army and Province

At the beginning of his reign Diocletian had stated his aims of returning good, sound government to the empire, and twenty years of (almost) uncontested rule provided the conditions to allow reforms that laid the basis for late Roman government and social organization. Under his direction undisguised absolutism came to the Roman empire, which made implementing the many changes a far simpler task than any of his predecessors had faced. Two of the most important reforms affected provincial organization: the division of the old provinces into smaller administrative units, and the total separation of military and civil power.

The basic structure of the Roman provinces had remained largely unchanged since the time of Septimius Severus, who completed the reorganization of Augustus. Diocletian began a process of further dividing the provinces into more compact units. Only the smallest, such as Sicily, were left untouched; others were either halved or further divided into fractions. It was a process which would continue under later emperors until by the fifth century there was in excess of 120 provinces.

Some of the provincial governors were still selected from the among the senators, but all the appointments were in Diocletian's hands, and what had been a nominal control by the senate now almost disappeared entirely, with only two small provinces left in its preserve to govern. The new administrators were responsible to a praetorian prefect, except for Africa and Asiana, whose governors reported directly to the emperor and were still called *proconsuls*. Of the remainder the two consular governors were styled *consulares*, the praetorian *correctores*, and a governor of equestrian rank was given the generic title of *praeses*, who had the rank of *perfectissimi*.

This division had a twofold benefit in further reducing the power of individual governors, and making local administration more effective and efficient, particularly in view of his taxation reforms (see below). Control of the *praesides* was organized by grouping the provinces into twelve *dioceses*: Oriens, Pontica, Asiana, Thraciae, Moesiae, Pannoniae, Italy, Viennensis, Galliae (frequently also called Septem Provinciae), Britannia, Hispaniae and Africa. Each diocese was placed under a new equestrian official, the *vicarius*, who acted as a representative of the praetorian prefect of each tetrarch. The prefects, who had not held a military command over the praetorian guard since the reforms of Hadrian, retained judicial powers and had supreme

command of the armies of the empire. However, this praetorian power was regulated by giving the *vicari* direct access to the tetrarch; it was the Augusti and Caesars, not the *praefecti*, who heard any appeals from the *vicari*. Thus Diocletian reduced the danger associated with the monopolization of power by chief ministers. Italy and the praetorian guard were the great losers in this restructuring. The proud Latin heartland of Italy was broken up into fourteen provinces of its own diocese and treated like any other region of the empire; eventually, even its traditional tax-exempt status would be removed. As for the praetorians, Diocletian reduced them to no more than the garrison of Rome.

The process of correcting the weaknesses inherent in the Augusto-Severan military reforms had begun under Gallienus, but Diocletian went much further. In the Augustan system provincial governors and army *legati* were usually appointed because of their social or political status and not for their military skills, so they frequently had little army experience. Gallienus had already removed from senators the command of troops in provinces where legions were stationed, giving it instead to officers of equestrian rank. But in smaller provinces under equestrian control, civilian and military functions were still combined. Diocletian made the separation absolute, except in Mauretania and Isauria (the new province of western Cilicia in the diocese of Oriens), where unsettled conditions demanded the sole command of military and civilian administration. From this point on, command of the frontier armies was in the hands of professional career soldiers styled *dux* (*duces* in the plural). The term had already gained common currency, but under the tetrarchy it became an official ranking.

Under Augustus the legions and corresponding *auxilia*, raised from among provincials who had not yet received citizenship, were stationed in the imperial frontier provinces, with no provision made for reserves. To conduct a war meant denuding other sections of the frontier, leaving them open to barbarian attack—a situation continuously repeated throughout the chaos of the third century. The Roman army had also been deficient in cavalry, its relatively few units provided by the *auxilia*. Gallienus had been the first to recognize the necessity of a larger cavalry force with independence from the infantry, and Aurelian had expanded the notion. Further development now created a fully mobile field army to complement the increasingly stagnant *limitanei* (frontier garrisons, on the *limites*), with an ever greater emphasis on cavalry.

On his accession Diocletian had some forty legions at his disposal and, in accordance with his greater division of the provinces, it is possible that he increased this number to as many as sixty, although many of these may have been below the strength of the old standard. The objective was to spread the available resources more efficiently throughout the frontier provinces, and ensure their support from the increased *auxilia* so that draining manpower from adjacent provinces should no longer be necessary. Additionally, the independent cavalry gained in importance as the mobile arm of the field army. This is highlighted by the name used to describe the cavalry, *vexillationes*—the term that had once described infantry detachments of the Republican legions. Diocletian and Maximian also detached mobile units from their legions to act as reserves, encamped at way-station towns such as Aquileia. Others formed an elite cavalry corps called the *scholae palatinae*, which effectively replaced the praetorians as the imperial bodyguard and traveled wherever any of the tetrarchs went, providing a highly motivated stiffening to the garrison troops. Contemporary critics claimed Diocletian quadrupled the army's size, but doubling it seems more likely.

[25. Link to: Tetrarchs & Administration](#)

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Taxes, the Division of Labor, and Religion

Of course, the increase in the size of the army and the added burden of expanded provincial administration meant more and new taxes to pay for them, and highlighted the problem of spiraling inflation that had resulted from the period of anarchy. Diocletian had new gold coins struck at a greater rate of metal purity and created a new silver standard. While these measures restored confidence in the face value of the currency and helped to stabilize the economy, they did not go far enough. The problem was that copper did not hold its value anything like as well as gold and silver. The result was a continuing inflation as expressed in copper coin, the basis for everyday commerce among the empire's populations. To offset this, in 301 Diocletian issued his *Edictum de Pretiis* (Edict on Prices) for the protection of the poor. Maximum legal prices were imposed on a wide range of products and services, although critics like the contemporary writer Lactantius claimed that the measure was a complete failure because it served only to drive goods off the market and into a black economy. Perhaps the very fact that for the first time in fifty years a government was seen to be enacting legislation in such meticulous detail had a psychologically beneficial effect. Certainly many sites have produced fragments of the massive, inscribed edict.

The many Diocletianic tax reforms were progressively introduced and added up to the establishment of a standard unit of taxation, based on the labor and animal stock employed on agricultural land, and on the area of land owned—a concern with agrarian matters that emphasized the fact that the third- and fourth-century Roman nobles still considered themselves farmers at heart, like their Republican forebears. This resulted in a calculated unit of liability, which was subjected to a rate of taxation applied uniformly throughout the empire, the rate altering depending on the annually predicted needs of the *fiscus*. However, with his attention to detail Diocletian refused to accept such a simplistic method of assessing a unit of liability. It needed to be an equitable system to be both practical and fair (and so avoid localized unrest). Therefore, allowances were made to take into account the fertility of the land, available modes of cultivation, and the cash-value of the resulting type of crops that could be grown. For the first time, the Roman government was able to budget. After estimating the annual outlay and dividing the figure by the number of tax-payer units in the empire, or any part of it, the rate of taxation could be calculated. These measures and the increased complexity of

tax legislation led to an enlarged bureaucracy, which became typical of the late Roman period. The chronicler Lactantius moaned that Diocletian's tax reforms resulted in an empire that contained more tax-collectors than tax-payers.

One effect of the new taxation system was a grading of the population into classes, each with an obligation to the state. While this process had been ongoing since Republican times, Aurelian had introduced a greater degree of state involvement in the system and now Diocletian brought rigid control to what had been a voluntary service among the nobility and, among the lower classes, a natural inclination for son to follow father in trade. He benefited from Aurelian's militarization of the various *collegia*, which more easily allowed him to effectively regulate the workforce. Diocletian decreed that no worker might leave his *collegium* or change his trade, and sons were legally bound to follow their father's vocation. The compulsory occupations included soldiers, builders, bakers, members of town councils, and *coloni* (tenant farmers), to name but a few. Although promotion was not made impossible, the privilege was jealously guarded. The policy created a caste system throughout the empire that stifled initiative, dampened ambition, reduced land workers to virtual slavery, and proved ultimately detrimental.

Fourth-century writers credit Diocletian with the adoption of many forms associated with an oriental monarchy. Layers of court officials, eunuchs, and chamberlains restricted access to his presence, and he was rarely seen in public. He introduced the ceremony and etiquette of the Persian court, which included *adoratio*—the prostration of those granted an audience and the kissing of his garment's purple hem. Diocletian was no longer addressed as princeps or by the soldierly *Imperator* but as *Dominus Noster* (Our Lord). It would be easy to see these developments as the self-aggrandizement of a power-crazed tyrant, but his abdication after twenty years of rule negates this view. In the same way that he had identified himself with *Jovius*—although not with the godhead—the attributes of a glorified potentate were the essential means of establishing the emperor's abiding and supreme authority.

Diocletian's oriental courtly manifestations echoed those of Aurelian, but Diocletian did not elevate Sol Invictus to the head of the Roman pantheon, returning that right to Jupiter Optimus Maximus, who is also *Jovius*. In fact, unlike Aurelian, Diocletian was very conservative in his religious beliefs and practices, and he made

offerings to numerous Roman and oriental gods. His devotion to the old religion meant that he was averse to any new creeds that might undermine the empire's unity. His distrust first manifested itself against the Manicheans, adherents of a Persian creed that blended Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Neo-Platonism. But it was from the Christians that he met with the strongest opposition. There was no official persecution of Christians during the early years of his reign, which may be attributed to his wife and daughter's profession of the faith, or perhaps his underestimation of a Church suffering from schism.

This situation changed abruptly in 302. The blame is usually laid at the feet of Galerius, an uncompromising opponent of Christianity who after his Persian victories had gained considerable influence with Diocletian. Christians were expelled from the court and any soldiers who persisted openly in their faith were cashiered. On February 23, 303 Diocletian issued an edict to compel Christians to worship the state's gods in the face of fierce penalties. Two further edicts aimed at the clergy led to mass arrests and even executions, and in 304 extended the provisions of the third edict to cover all Christians. For the first time, an anti-Christian edict included the closure of churches, their destruction, and the burning of sacred books.

Diocletian, Constitutional Architect

According to Lactantius, Diocletian was a mad builder:

He had a limitless passion for building, which led to an equally limitless scouring of the provinces to raise workers, craftsmen, wagons, and whatever was necessary for building operations. Here he built basilicas, there a circus, a mint, an arms-factory, here he built a house for his wife, there one for his daughter.

Diocletian only visited Rome once, yet he did not stint on its monuments. He made extensive repairs on a lavish scale to many buildings in the center that had been damaged by a fire that broke out in Pompey's Theater in 284. The building's colonnade was restored, as were the Basilica Julia and a range of temples surrounding the Forum Romanum. The fire also destroyed the senate house rebuilt by Julius Caesar, and despite having little use for its members, Diocletian had a new curia built, which still stands today. Most extensive were his glorious baths, the largest in Rome, capable of holding three thousand bathers.

However, most of his public works were undertaken in the provinces, especially at Nicomedia. Here, acerbic Lactantius tells us, the spate of building was such that:

Suddenly a great part of the city was destroyed, and all the inhabitants started to migrate with their wives and children, as if the city had been captured by the enemy. And when these buildings had been completed and the provinces ruined in the process, he would say: "They have not been built rightly; they must be done in another way."

For himself, Diocletian built a massive palace at Salonae on the Dalmatian coast overlooking the Adriatic. It was modeled on a Roman army camp and more resembles a medieval king's castle than the familiar open Roman palace. To these undertakings should be added the extensive attempt to create a *limes* along the border regions of Arabia, Syria, and Palmyra. New roads and a series of forts and fortified towns linked Bosra in the south to Nicephorium (Raqqa) on the Euphrates in the north. Similar work was done along the Danube, completing the task of restoring to the empire a new security.

Diocletian made his only visit to Rome as an emperor toward the end of 303, together with Maximian, to celebrate Diocletian's twenty years of rule in a month-long series of festivities commencing on November 17. Diocletian was about fifty-eight and suffering from some chronic complaint—a reason given for his acceding to Galerius

so easily over the Christian persecution—and wanted to order the moment of his abdication. If he alone stood down, it would leave Maximian, a soldier not an administrator, as senior Augustus, with Constantius as his colleague, thus condemning Galerius to serve as Caesar to Maximian, whom he despised. The solution was for both Augusti to abdicate simultaneously, and each to promote their Caesar. This was not what Maximian wanted, and it took Diocletian all his persuasive powers to obtain his consent, finally extracted as an oath in the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. The timing set for joint abdication was in the spring of 305, after Maximian had also celebrated his *vicennalia*.

The obvious choices to succeed Constantius and Galerius as their Caesars were hereditary: Maximian's twenty-year-old son Maxentius and, his elder by some nine years, Constantine the bastard son of Constantius. Maxentius had married Galerius's daughter Valeria Maximilla, and in 298 Constantine had been betrothed to Maximian's infant daughter Fausta. Constantine had already distinguished himself in service to Galerius against the Persians in 298 and under Diocletian against the Sarmatae in 299, but Maxentius seems to have been passed over for military commands, probably reflecting Diocletian's doubts over his qualities as a future Caesar. The detestation Galerius felt for Maximian extended to his son (despite his being Galerius's son-in-law), which also counted against his promotion. Diocletian was, therefore, faced with a dilemma: could he afford to pass over the legitimate son of an emperor, in favor of the bastard of a Caesar? Maximian's abdication promise would not withstand such a slight, and so neither was chosen.

On the first day of May 305 at Nicomedia and at Mediolanum, Diocletian and Maximian formally abdicated in the presence of their soldiers, becoming *Seniores Augusti* and *Patres Imperatorum et Caesarum*. Diocletian announced the elevation of his choice of Caesars to serve the new Augusti Constantius and Galerius. Lactantius tells us of the troops' bafflement at Constantine being passed over and their bewilderment at hearing the names Flavius Valerius Severus (a friend of Galerius, but less popular with the troops) and Galerius's nephew Maximinus Daia read out. Shortly after these ceremonies, Diocletian retired to his palace at Saloniae, there to raise vegetables on the extensive roof-gardens, and Maximian retired to Lucania in the south of Italy. While unwell and worn-out, Diocletian was content to watch the outcome of his dynastic scheme from his cabbage patch, but

Maximian was restless in his retirement. As a result of these arrangements, the next eight years would be a time of civil war, although quite different in character from any of the previous upheavals. While some protagonists would strive for sole *imperium*, others would seek to secure a position as Caesar or Augustus within the tetrarchic structure. The events of 305–13 reveal a complex pattern of intrigue and treachery, open war and quickly made alliances, as quickly broken.

Constantius I Chlorus

Gaius Flavius Valerius Constantius

[Caesar March 1, 293; co-Augustus May 1, 305 to July 25, 306]

Galerius

Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximianus

[Caesar March 1, 293; co-Augustus May 1, 305 to early May, 311]

Born into a noble Dardanian family on March 31, c.250, Constantius Chlorus (“the pale”) entered into military service early and due to his abilities found swift promotion through the ranks to become governor of Dalmatia before serving as praetorian prefect to Maximian. He was about twenty-two when, while serving in Pannonia in 272/3, his mistress Flavia Julia Helena bore him a son called Constantinus (Constantine). History remains hazy about Helena’s actual relationship with Constantius at the time; due to the influence she would have on the spread of Christianity many legends were later fostered. One of the more important of these was the absolute assumption that she was the legal wife of Constantius, thus making Constantine, the first Christian emperor, a legitimate son. Helena was born at Drepanum (later renamed Helenopolis) on the Gulf of Nicomedia. If they were married, Constantius divorced her in about 292 in order to marry Flavia Maximiana Theodora, stepdaughter of Maximian. Of this union there were six children—all boys, according to Eutropius—including Flavius Dalmatius and Flavius Julius Constantius. Eutropius, however, was wrong because there were at least two daughters, Constantia and Anastasia. Constantius’s career as Caesar to Maximian is covered above.

Some five years younger than his colleague, Galerius was born in Dacia Ripensis near Serdica (Sofia) at a small settlement later renamed Romulianum after his mother Romula—a woman from beyond the Danube; nothing of his father is known. His family were peasants, and Galerius was a herdsman as a youth. Uneducated and tough, Galerius also found fortune by entering military service, rising to the rank of praetorian prefect to Diocletian, after which, his career as Caesar is also detailed above. The name of his first wife, who bore him a daughter, Valeria Maximilla, remains unknown, but he divorced her in 293 to marry Galeria Valeria, Diocletian’s daughter; and he also had a son, Candidianus, by an unknown mistress.

An accurate historical assessment of the characters of the two new Augusti is inevitably difficult due to the prejudices of the later

Christian writers. Galerius, of low birth and held responsible for the terrible Christian persecution, is portrayed as a monster, while Constantius of noble birth, father of Constantine the Great, and known to have largely disregarded the Diocletianic religious edicts, is a wise and kindly ruler. However, if the acts of their reigns are used as the measure, these prejudicial portraits are shown to be reasonably fair to the facts. Constantius gained tremendous respect and even affection among the provincials of Gaul and Britain, whereas Galerius was direct and vigorous, a man of action, but also an unimaginative administrator, and frequently cruel. Had Constantius survived longer than a year as Augustus, he might have grown into a worthy successor to Diocletian.

Soon after the inauguration in August 305 the members of the second tetrarchy made a new distribution of the empire between them. Spain was added to Constantius's holdings of Britain and Gaul. His Caesar, Severus, took over the African dioceses and Italy, and Pannonia was removed from Galerius and given to him. In compensation Galerius was given command over the whole of Asia Minor west of the Taurus mountains as well as the remaining Illyrian and Balkan provinces. His Caesar, Maximinus Daia, received the remainder of the eastern provinces and Egypt. Because of their respective rankings as Caesars Constantius became the senior tetrarch. However, Galerius's subordination meant little, for both the new Caesars were his men—Maximinus the son of his sister, Severus a long-time close friend—and neither seemed to possess the strength of character to counter his will. Thus, through Severus, he exercised considerable influence in Constantius's dominions, and effectively ruled three-quarters of the Roman empire. In addition, Constantius's son Constantine, residing with Helena at Byzantium, within Galerius's dominion, besides being a useful tribune represented a convenient hostage in any potential confrontation with Constantius.

This unhappy situation was altered at the end of year when news of a massive invasion of Pictish tribes in northern Britain arrived at Treveri. Constantius appealed to Galerius to release his son to help in repelling the barbarians from his diocese. Probably much against his better judgment, Galerius complied, and Constantine left Byzantium immediately to cross Europe. Relieved at this news, Constantius went to Gesoriacum to begin preparations for the British campaign and his son—now a mature man of thirty-three—joined him there. In the early spring of 306 the expeditionary force crossed the narrow Fretum

Gallicum. During his twelve years of rule, Constantius had managed to restore order, discipline, and confidence in the British garrison since the chaos years of the Imperium Gallorum and the depredations of Carausius and Allectus. With a stiffening of detachments from Gaul, the campaign to evict the Picts was swift and completely victorious. Constantius assumed the title of Britannicus Maximus for the second time and retired to Eburacum (York), where suddenly he died on July 25, 306. His cognomen Chlorus refers to his pale skin, which may have been due to a wasting disease such as leukemia. His untimely death in his fifty-sixth year almost wrecked Diocletian's tetrarchic system.

Constantine had ever been a popular figure with the eastern army, and in a short space of time achieved a similar level of affection among the western troops. The British and Gallic armies had no hesitation in proclaiming him Augustus in his father's place and—wisely or not—he accepted. There can be little doubt that he wished to avoid a return to the uncertainties of being a hostage to Galerius, and making his own claim for recognition was the best way to prevent such a situation arising. However, wishing to avoid civil war, he wrote to Galerius requesting confirmation of his elevation. While waiting for the reply, Constantine took the mobile units of his army back to Gaul to deal with a minor revolt of Franks, and then went south in force to Narbonensis, a move that—in its proximity to Italy—might be interpreted as passively threatening.

If Galerius had thought to raise Severus to Augustus and nominate another of his own creatures to the rank of Caesar, the acclaim of the western army for Constantine thwarted him. Mindful also of his own troops' affection for Constantine, he offered a compromise that recognized Constantine at the lower rank of Caesar to serve under Severus as Augustus. Partly because Constantine did not feel strong enough yet to dispute Galerius, and partly out of respect for Diocletian's constitutional arrangements, he accepted this inferior status, and so the tetrarchy survived in its original structure.

Severus II

Flavius Valerius Severus

[Caesar May 1, 305; co-Augustus August 306 to March/April 307
abdicated; died September 16, 307]

Maxentius

Marcus Aurelius Valerius Maxentius

[Augustus October 28, 306 to October 28, 312]

As has been related, Maxentius had been passed over by Diocletian in 305, along with Constantine, but while the latter was now a Caesar, Maxentius was no more than a young *privatus* dwelling in Rome, married to Valeria Maximilla, the daughter of Galerius, who had borne him a son named Valerius Romulus. Given Diocletian's estimate of Maxentius's abilities, it is less likely that ambition drove him to a *coup d'état* than that he was raised to the purple by the praetorian guard. Having reduced the number of cohorts, Diocletian had also affronted the guards' dignity by downgrading them to lowly garrison status for the city of Rome. Galerius now took the further step of abolishing the *Castra Praetoria*. In Maxentius, the remaining praetorians in concert with the *cohortes urbanae*, who had shared the camp, saw a means of avenging themselves on Galerius. The common people also gave their full support to Maxentius because Galerius had decided to tax them as part of the Diocletianic Italian provinces—something that had never happened in imperial Rome's history. With a loathed census for taxation purposes in the offing, and the tacit support of the urban prefect Annius Anullinus, Maxentius assumed the purple on October 28, 306 without opposition except that of Abellinus, the *vicarius* and a supporter of Galerius, who was put to death for his resistance.

Amid the universal rejoicing for a legitimate son of an Augustus “justly” succeeding his father Maximian, Maxentius must, nonetheless, have been worried. The depleted praetorian guards represented little in the way of an army, and while he could take comfort from his recognition by Africa, the Tyrrhenian island provinces, and southern and central Italy, he still had to proceed cautiously. Northern Italy remained loyal to Severus in Mediolanum, and it was to isolate him politically that Maxentius determined on a complex course of action. In an attempt to placate Galerius he assumed the old title of princeps instead of Augustus, and struck coins in honor of the Augusti and Caesars, by which move he hoped to ingratiate himself with them,

particularly with Constantine.

More importantly, he made overtures to his father in Lucania. Many of Maximian's soldiers were now serving with Severus, and if they could be induced to return to their old allegiance, the maintenance of his position would be assured. Maximian had expressed his disapproval of an elevation made by the praetorian guard, but Maxentius seduced his father with an offer of the imperial insignia and told him it was his responsibility to resume his position as senior Augustus, which he hoped would legitimize his usurpation. Maximian consented, but before he set out for Rome he tested the water by writing to Diocletian, inviting him to re-enter public life in the interests of peace for the empire. The response was almost two years in coming.

Galerius appeared to be more alarmed that the praetorians had seized the old privilege of making an emperor than he was at the actuality of Maxentius's usurpation, for he had no high opinion of the pretender. His first act was to order Severus as the western Augustus into action. Severus left Mediolanum early in 307, but Maxentius's trust in old loyalties proved well placed. Unwilling to fight against the son of their old commander, the majority of men deserted Severus, forcing him to flee back north with only a few remaining troops. Maximian, who had now reached Rome and, for the second time, assumed his position as Augustus, chased Severus to Ravenna, where peace terms were arranged. In return for his life being spared, Severus abdicated and was imprisoned as a hostage against Galerius at a small village to the south of Rome called Tres Tabernae.

Father and son now had control of the whole of the African and Italian dioceses with the exception of Raetia I and II, and the obvious next course of action was to make an alliance with Constantine to protect their position from Galerius. This was achieved in the spring of 307, when Maximian completed the betrothal agreement and took his daughter Fausta—now aged about fourteen—to Treveri and married her to Constantine. He also raised his new son-in-law to the rank of co-Augustus. In return Constantine acknowledged Maxentius as the senior emperor. Constantine later issued coins as a further gesture of goodwill that styled Maxentius as Augustus, and he had the name of Severus erased from all the monuments that had been set up to him. Maximian continued to remain at Constantine's court, while Maxentius looked after affairs in Rome... a division that was to have serious consequences.

Meanwhile Galerius had mobilized his own forces, and in the summer of 307 he advanced without opposition through Italy until he reached Interamna, to the north of Rome. Here, he encountered problems. Although his army was numerically superior to the one Severus had mustered, it was insufficient to the task of storming Rome's mighty Aurelian Wall, and his forced march had prevented bringing any siege engines with him. Worse, his troops had ravaged the surrounding countryside in their progress, while Rome was well provisioned with supplies from Africa and Sicily. Privation sapped the men's will to continue the siege, and several even deserted to return home. Galerius had no alternative but to beat a hasty and disorderly retreat to the north. In this condition the army should have made easy pickings, but for some reason Maxentius remained firmly behind the city walls. There can have been no lingering sympathy for his wife's father, so he must have relied on Constantine to pursue the enemy, but whatever the reason for his dilatory attitude it was a political and military blunder.

At Constantine's court, Maximian was losing faith in his son. Knowing that there would never be peace between Maxentius and Galerius and that a bloody civil war would result, he asked Constantine to join him in crushing Galerius's retreating army before marching on Rome to depose Maxentius. Several factors held Constantine back, among which should be counted his disapproval of undoing Diocletian's system, which at the same time, with the removal of Galerius, would leave Maximinus Daia free to consolidate his power in the eastern dioceses. Relations between the three Augusti deteriorated sharply when news of Galerius's debacle in Italy resulted in Spain declaring for Maxentius. This effectively robbed Constantine of six provinces, and he broke off friendly relations with Maxentius. When Maximian, now fifty-seven, heard that his wayward son had disobeyed orders and had Severus put to death on September 16, 307, he set out for Rome determined to depose him. However, he had underestimated the hold that apparent success had given Maxentius over the troops, and when Maximian went up to his son and dramatically ripped the purple robe off his shoulders, they refused to support their former commander. Maximian was forced to flee from Rome back to Gaul and Constantine's court early in 308.

Congress at Carnuntum

Galerius—thanks to Maxentius having let him get out of Italy so easily—could sit and lick his military and political wounds. In his bewilderment at the empire's confusion he turned to Diocletian for his experience. Galerius nominated the retired Augustus for the consulship of 308, and then made the unprecedented move of convening a conference at Carnuntum in an attempt to settle differences between the multiplying rulers. To this Diocletian was coaxed into attending, along with Maximian. In the midst of their mutual hatred, Galerius and Maximian shared one thought in common, that Diocletian should re-enter public life and resume his old office. In this they were both disappointed, for Diocletian refused the offer. Moreover, at the conference's conclusion in November 308 he dashed Maximian's hopes for a favorable outcome and allowed Galerius to triumph. Maximian was forced to resign again and Diocletian insisted that all his imperial acts since his formal abdication in 305 be annulled. This, of course, included his legitimization of Maxentius—who was declared a usurper and public enemy—and his grant of the title Augustus to Constantine. Diocletian now appointed another old friend of Galerius, Licinianus Licinius as Augustus to replace Severus, and gave him the administration of Italy, Africa, and Spain, although these were actually under the control of Maxentius the usurper. Constantine was demoted to the rank of Caesar, and the position of Maximinus Daia was left untouched.

Although Diocletian had, in theory, re-established a tetrarchy, it was done in a manner inconsistent with his system because Licinius had achieved the rank of Augustus without ever having been a Caesar. The promotion was also bound to cause resentment in the two junior members at having Licinius promoted over their heads. In an attempt at consolation, Galerius bestowed on them both the title of *Filii Augustorum* (sons of the Augusti). To Constantine this only added insult to injury. Not only did he throw the empty title back in Galerius's face, he also refused to accept his demotion at Diocletian's order. His defiance was marked by tumultuous cries of approval from the Gallic provincials and his troops. Alarmed at his growing power, the other Caesar, Maximinus Daia, had himself proclaimed Augustus by his Syrian army on the first day of May 310, and Galerius was obliged to acknowledge the *fait accompli*.

The unhappily divisive outcome of the congress at Carnuntum had little immediate effect on Maxentius, who retained the loyalty of his

main army in Italy. But in Africa —so essential for Rome's food supply —Maxentius had reason to suspect the loyalty of the civilian and military administration and demanded of the *vicarius*, Lucius Domitius Alexander, that he send his son to Rome as a hostage. Incensed, Alexander refused and a rebellion erupted during which he was proclaimed Augustus by his African troops at the end of 308. The loss of the African grain supply was a serious blow to Maxentius, but while he still held Spain, famine was not a dire threat, and no immediate action was taken against Alexander. And then in the following year Maxentius suffered a great personal loss with the death of his son Romulus, in whom he had placed all his hopes for the future of the Herculan dynasty.

Meanwhile, Maximian had returned to the shelter of Constantine's court at Treveri. There Constantine accorded him all the courtesies due to a father-in-law and ex-Augustus, while carefully ensuring he remained in genteel inactivity. For a year all was peaceful, but in 310 Maximian's restlessness got the better of him again, and while Constantine was away campaigning against the Franks near Colonia Agrippina, Maximian took advantage of his absence to win over some of the garrison. He removed himself south to Arelate (Arles) and had himself proclaimed Augustus for a third time. The adventure was doomed to failure. Constantine speedily concluded his affairs on the Rhine and hastened to the chastisement of his father-in-law. Maximian fled to Massilia (Marseilles), where he was besieged and his own men eventually persuaded him to capitulate.

Constantine spared his life, but soon afterward, in July, he was found dead. The official verdict was suicide, but it would not be hard to forgive Constantine if, exasperated by the sixty-year-old reprobate's continual scheming, he had ordered his execution.

Constantine now faced a constitutional dilemma caused by the nullifying of Maximian's acts, since his position of Augustus had rested on Maximian's recognition of his status. He now turned to another basis for his authority and allowed the rumor to spread that his father Constantius Chlorus was the natural son of Claudius Gothicus. With this fiction, he claimed descent from an earlier emperor and so legitimized his imperial position on the principle of hereditary succession. At the same time he also invented a foundation on which he might ultimately establish title to a sole constitutional *imperium* within the empire. He now disassociated himself from the Herculan dynasty of Maxentius, founded by Maximian, by replacing Hercules as

his protecting deity with Sol Invictus, worshipped as Apollo in Gaul. He was ready to move. On the pretext of coastal attacks on Hispaniae by Frankish pirates, Constantine entered the diocese and annexed the provinces to his own administration. He could, of course, argue that he was only getting back what should rightfully have been his in the first place.

The loss of Spain on top of Africa was a disaster for Maxentius. Famine spread quickly in Rome, and street violence became endemic between the pampered praetorians and the starving mob. As many as six thousand may have perished. Maxentius had to snatch back Africa. In the spring of 311 he sent his praetorian prefect Gaius Rufius Volusianus to Africa. Alexander—elderly and no military genius—proved no match for Volusianus, who quickly defeated the usurper and had him executed. With Africa restored, the food supply was secured and, with wealth confiscated from Alexander's supporters, Maxentius celebrated a triumph. He then had his father deified and struck coins in his memory as well as that of Constantius. Neither were maudlin gestures—deification of his father improved his own position as Augustus, and honoring Constantine's father was not only a political snub, it was also an indication of his claim to the whole of the western half of the empire. War with Constantine was now inevitable.

The Rise of Constantine

Galerius, who was in his mid-fifties, was in ill health by the spring of 311, suffering from a cancer that the Christians gleefully attributed to divine retribution for his hatred of their faith. In his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius tells of his suffering with a somewhat un-Christian relish:

From them [his suppurating cancer wounds] came a teeming indescribable mass of worms, and a sickening smell was given off; for the whole of his hulking body, thanks to over-eating, had been transformed even before his illness into a huge lump of flabby fat, which then decomposed and presented those who came near with a revolting sight.

The doctors, who could not bear to be near their smelly patient, Eusebius tells us, were instantly put to death. Perhaps the great persecutor also believed that his sickness was a judgment of the angry Christian god because he issued an Edict of Tolerance on April 30 granting freedom of worship under certain conditions. But it did nothing to save him, and he died a few days later.

In one sense Galerius's death simplified the political situation. The empire was now in the hands of four Augusti: Constantine held the western provinces; Maxentius Africa, the Tyrrhenian islands and Italy; Licinius the Balkans and much of Asia Minor; and Maximinus Daia—technically now the senior Augustus—Egypt up to eastern Cappadocia. But the complex interweaving of mutual mistrust between them all precluded any peaceful outcome. Immediately on hearing of Galerius's death, Maximinus Daia increased his grip on the eastern provinces. He overran Pontica and Asiana, and forced Licinius to a settlement that left him only the Illyrian dioceses, with the Bosphorus and Hellespont the boundary between them. Constantine needed an alliance with one or the other in order to prosecute his war on Maxentius without interference, and selected Licinius simply because he was the nearer and so quicker to deal with, not to mention being, due to his proximity, the greater threat. They quickly concluded a treaty and sealed the pact with the betrothal to Licinius of Constantine's half-sister Constantia.

In December 311 Diocletian died at Salonae in his massive palace. There is considerable disparity in the histories about the year of Diocletian's death, although the day—December 3—more readily finds agreement. Years ranging from 311 to 316 are given. However, considering the poor and deteriorating state of the emperor's health, the earliest date makes the most sense. It also complies with the

actions of Constantine, who must have felt the greatest reluctance to begin the dismemberment of the Diocletianic constitutional system while the great man still lived. Lactantius claims he committed suicide from the disappointment at seeing the fruits of his constitutional labors ruined. In whatever circumstance he met his end, Diocletian was to remain one of the most extraordinary of Roman emperors. Eutropius wrote the best epithet:

...he alone of all men, since the foundation of the Roman empire, voluntarily returned from so high a dignity to the condition of private life, and to an equality with the other citizens. That happened to him, therefore, which had happened to no one since men were created, that, though he died in a private condition, he was enrolled among the gods.

With the death of the one man to whom Constantine owed his allegiance—more to his philosophy than to his substance—he was finally free to begin the remarkable series of campaigns that were to make him the sole ruler of the Roman empire. In the early spring of 312 the war began. His prospects, however, looked unpromising. Because he had no intention of repeating the errors of previous emperors by depleting his garrison in the face of renewed barbarian activity across the Rhine, he set out from Gaul with only a quarter of his available force, an expeditionary army of about forty thousand men. To his front, Maxentius could call on at least four times that number, if not as much as the recorded hundred and eighty-eight thousand. The hard core of this army was the praetorian guard and his father's veteran soldiers, plus a novel cavalry force called *clibanarii*, whose riders and mounts were protected by iron plate armor. Constantine, however, was much the better general and his troops were more than a match for Maxentius's slovenly soldiers, most of whom he planned to keep under his own command in Rome, where stores were being stockpiled in anticipation of a siege. The Aurelian Wall, satisfactory against barbarians, was deemed insufficiently strong to defy a trained Roman army, and Maxentius began strengthening and transforming it in the uncompromisingly tough manner of all his buildings.

Maxentius had been an energetic builder during his six-year reign. In addition to the massive strengthening of the Aurelian Wall that he now embarked on, he contributed the largest vaulted building ever attempted by Roman civil engineers. The Basilica Nova of Maxentius was actually completed by Constantine, and is sometimes confusingly known by the latter's name as a result. Described by many modern

critics as the most magnificent monument in the whole of the Forum Romanum and by others as the climax of Roman architecture, it stands on the northern side of the eastern end of the Forum, and actually crossed the Via Sacra. The gigantic rectangle measured 350 feet by nearly 250 feet (107 by 76m), and the monumental weight of the coffered ceiling was carried by only four huge piers (the much earlier Basilica Julia, one-third the size, required 74 columns to carry its much lighter roof). Originally decorated with marble veneers to the lower courses and molded stucco to the upper walls and ceilings overlaid with paint and gilding, what remains today is only brick-faced. The Basilica Nova used innovative architecture that threw out most of the previous classical forms, and with its mix of groin- and barrel-vaults, is the forerunner of the great Romanesque religious basilicas of the medieval era.

South of the city beside the Via Appia Maxentius had laid out a palace complex, the ruins of which can be seen today. It included a large circus capable of holding fifteen thousand spectators, and a massive, domed mausoleum set in a rectangular colonnaded enclosure. As Maxentius was never to rest in his mausoleum, neither was his statue to grace his beautiful basilica. After completing the building, Constantine set up the colossal statue of himself that can be seen today in pieces in the courtyard of the Palazzo dei Conservatori in Rome.

The rest of Maxentius's army was scattered between outposts in northern Italy, with a sizeable detachment stationed at Verona under the command of Ruricius Pompeianus to defend the Brenner Pass in case Licinius should attempt an advance from Raetia or Noricum.

The War on Maxentius

Constantine crossed the Alps and dropped into Italy due west of Augusta Taurinorum (Turin), where he took the outpost garrison of Segusio (Susa) entirely by surprise. The main body of the enemy was gathered before Augusta Taurinorum, but through use of clever tactics Constantine managed to lure the *clibanarii* into an enclosure. The weight of their armor frustrated their efforts, and Augusta Taurinorum was captured. The victory caused all the Transpadene cities and towns except Verona to open their gates. In order to secure his lines of communication with Licinius, Verona had to fall, but Ruricius Pompeianus proved to be no pushover. From his temporary headquarters at Mediolanum, Constantine tried negotiating, but when this failed he marched on Verona, and there outside the city a great battle was fought that lasted well into the night before Ruricius was killed and the opposition melted away. Verona capitulated, soon followed by Mutina (Modena) after a short siege.

At this point, Constantine's victories had come at a high price. Injury and death had reduced his original expeditionary force to about twenty-five thousand men, nowhere near enough to face up to Maxentius. Constantine's history to this time had shown no signs of recklessness, and it was perfectly obvious that he would have to retire, or beg reinforcements from Licinius. And yet this highly cautious man did neither: against all expectation he advanced toward Rome and what looked like certain defeat. His confidence in ultimate victory certainly did not lie in the scale or discipline of his army—it was the righteousness of his cause that gave him strength. For by this time Constantine was to all intents and purposes a Christian. This is not to say he was a convert, but his mother Helena was a professed Christian and this, in combination with his natural tolerance, had reduced his Roman immunity to the mysteries of the religion. Eusebius tells of how, in later life, Constantine himself told the chronicler of how he had received a vision while worshipping Apollo, in which a cross stood above the sun, accompanied by the words "Conquer with this," followed by XXX, the years of the reign due to him.

This is the later Christian view. And yet it is difficult to believe that Constantine should have received such religious certainty as to risk everything on his small army defeating Maxentius, who was on his own ground. There is more to the story. Constantine must have weighed the risks very carefully. On his side he had the affection not only of his own troops, but those of the eastern dioceses; and

undoubtedly many in the Maxentian camp admired his reputation. Maxentius's soldiers were rightly doubtful of their own leader's military abilities—he had let Galerius escape from Italy without a fight and now preferred to hide behind Rome's walls instead of confronting Constantine in open battle despite an overwhelming superiority in numbers. The Christian histories tell us nothing of Constantine's military intelligence. Like any sensible general, he must have had agents within the city, who would have informed him of the extreme disaffection in which Maxentius was held after the famine, the sloppy discipline of his army, and the inevitable divisions between praetorians and regular soldiers.

Everything pointed to the fact that a determined march by a fiercely loyal army of highly trained and battle-hardened troops would—at the least—lead to a stream of desertions from the enemy's ranks and the alienation of Maxentius. Nevertheless, he sought extra insurance and had his men paint the Christian symbol on their shields. Close to Constantine, as the tutor of his eldest son Crispus, Lactantius says that during the night before the final battle Constantine was commanded in a dream to do this. Under his new standard, the so-called *labarum* the army marched on Rome.

The term *labarum* is of uncertain derivation, although it may have been familiar as a form of Roman army standard from the reign of Hadrian. Eusebius described that of Constantine as a long spear, overlaid with gold, and a transverse bar that formed the figure of a cross:

On the top of the whole was fixed a wreath of gold and precious stones, and within this the symbol of the Savior's name, two letters indicating the name of Christ by means of the initial letters, the letter X [chi] intersection P [rho] at the center.

The monogram was not Constantine's invention, for it was familiar to many Christians, but his adoption of it boosted its popularity enormously. A purple banner was suspended from the crossbar bearing the Greek inscription *touto nika*, rendered in Latin as in *hoc signo vinces* (in this sign you shall conquer). Eusebius tells us that it “being also richly interlaced with gold, presented an indescribable degree of beauty to the beholder.” Standards of a similar design were supplied to all the legions, replacing the traditional eagles, and the monogram was also engraved on the troops' shields.

Given that hardly any of his soldiers were Christians—more likely adherents of Mithras—this was an extraordinary exhibition of

Constantine's new-found belief in the Christian god. Receiving divine instruction by way of dreams or visions was a commonplace to the superstitious Romans, so perhaps in addition to his confidence in military strategy he determined to have every advantage on his side; and so his men advanced as the first Christian army in history.

Constantine's aggressive tactics bore fruit. Maxentius now decided to alter his strategy of staying put behind his massive fortifications. The change of plan may well have been forced on him because of the uncertain temper of the mob, restless since the recent food riots caused by Constantine's annexation of Spain. After crossing the Tiber by way of a specially constructed pontoon bridge and the Pons Mulvius (Milvian Bridge) next to it, Maxentius's vanguard went upstream until it reached the pass of the Saxa Rubra. Here, advance units of Constantine's small army blocked the way, and the whole column, many still fording the river, was brought to a standstill. Constantine seized the initiative. Leaving a sufficiently large force to hold the defile, he took his army across the ridges behind which the enemy was massed in the river valley. When he reached the Via Cassia, which joins the Via Flaminia at the Pons Mulvius, there was enough room to deploy his men into attack formations. The bridge was the objective, and the rocky ridges on either side protected his flank. Maxentius, hemmed in between the hills and the river, had no alternative but to convert the left flank of the strung out column into his center. In one swift tactic, Constantine had reduced the fighting capacity of Maxentius into a numerical inferiority.

Constantine's first assault broke the resistance of the enemy's front ranks and drove their supporting troops back in confusion toward the river, which was swollen with winter run off from the Appenines. Thousands of Maxentius's panicking men were drowned in the raging waters and many more, including Maxentius, were swept to their deaths when the pontoon bridge beside the Pons Mulvius collapsed under their weight. It was October 28, 312, the very same day when, six years earlier, Maxentius had unilaterally assumed the purple. He was not yet thirty.

Constantine entered Rome on the following day, carrying the head of Maxentius, whose body had been recovered some way down river. There was much rejoicing of the people and senate, who gratefully erected a statue of Constantine holding a cross in his right hand. Work was immediately begun on the magnificent arch by the Colosseum that to this day bears witness to his victory over the "usurper"

Maxentius. And by virtue of Constantine's shields, the battle of the Pons Mulvius became the first official Christian victory.

[26. Link to: Tetrarchs at War](#)

[Family Tree: Tetrarchs & Constantine](#)

Maximinus Daia

Gaius Galerius Valerius Maximinus Daia

[Caesar May 1, 305; Augustus May 1, 310 to July 313]

Licinius

Gaius Valerius Licinianus Licinius

[Augustus November 11, 308 to December 19, 324 abdicated; died early 325]

Constantine wasted no time in beginning the second part of fulfilling his destiny. The day after entering Rome on October 29, 312 he formally recognized the nominal powers of the senate. Then he had the senators confer on himself the status of senior Augustus, which since the death of Galerius had been that of Maximinus Daia. In theory, this invested him with the constitutional right to nominate consuls, and he immediately sent a dispatch to Maximinus naming him his colleague for 313, together with an order to stop the continuing persecution of Christians. To this, Maximinus paid temporary lip service, presumably to prevent Constantine from interfering in his sphere of influence—and countering his plans to conquer the dominions of Licinius.

During his stay in Rome Constantine ordered the complete disbandment of the praetorian guard because of its support for Maxentius, and began the process of returning to the Christian Church all the property that had belonged to it before the Diocletianic edicts. Romans must have been thrilled to have the popular conqueror restoring to them their ancient rights as the empire's pre-eminent city. In this view, however, they were to be severely disappointed...in time.

In the New Year he left Rome for Mediolanum to celebrate the marriage of his half-sister Constantia to Licinius, after which a second of those phenomena of the tetrarchic system occurred—the two Augusti held a conference.

The recent wedding might have pointed to there being common ground between the two Augusti, but this was far from the case, and the negotiations were protracted, tough, and uncompleted when they parted company. However, there was little disagreement from Licinius to Constantine's proposal of complete religious tolerance; the message of freedom to Christians in the eastern provinces was a useful weapon in the armory against Maximinus Daia. The provisions of this new tolerance were compiled into what became known as the Edict of Milan, and were sent to all *praesides* in the western dioceses. Licinius

was less happy to accept Constantine's assumed seniority, but eventually agreed to recognize it in return for the right to legislate within his own dominions, and for the legitimization of his bastard son to become his successor. They had yet to agree on how to divide up Maxentius's army and no settlement on the future administration of Italy and its adjoining provinces had been reached when the conference was interrupted by Constantine's urgent recall to the Rhine. There, a Frankish rebellion in Germania Inferior was terrorizing the populace. He successfully crushed the uprising during the following months, but his absence provided Maximinus Daia with his best opportunity to press home the attack on Licinius.

Beyond a birth date in the mid-260s in Dacia Ripensis, a peasant upbringing and an army career that brought him into contact with Galerius as a comrade-in-arms, nothing further is known about Licinius before his elevation to the purple on November 11, 308. The tetrarchic enemy he now faced was of equally lowly origins. Maximinus Daia, son of a sister of Galerius, was born in Illyricum on November 20, 270. He married, but his wife and daughter's names remain unknown. Despite his lowly birth and lack of education, Maximinus Daia encouraged the promotion of learning in his part of the empire, and seems to have had a statesman's grasp of politics and propaganda.

Like Galerius, he was an ardent Christian persecutor, and when Galerius ended the persecution in 311 with his Edict of Tolerance, Maximinus had acquiesced. However, after only six months he revised his policy and reintroduced a suppression of the Christians throughout his dominions. Although recusants were frequently sent to the mines, there were relatively few executions; but the propaganda was extreme. And it is clear that Maximinus understood the organization of the Christian Church better than his colleagues, because he set up a pagan priesthood that was graded in a similar way to the Christian hierarchy. Naturally enough, the Christian writers excoriated him, and Lactantius claims that he could not keep his hands off Valeria, daughter of Diocletian and widow of Galerius, even while she was still in mourning. However, it should be noted that the dispossessed relatives of Galerius and Severus seem to have preferred to live under his protection rather than that of Licinius.

Early in 313, while the winter snow still lay thick on the ground, Maximinus left Syria and crossed Anatolia with an army of some seventy thousand to besiege Byzantium. The city capitulated after

eleven days, leaving the way open into Thracia and the dominions of Licinius, and a few days later his army was encamped around Heraclea. Concluding the conference in Mediolanum with Constantine, Licinius hurried back to the Balkans and mobilized what army he could, probably only thirty thousand men. He then marched to Hadrianopolis (Edirne), before turning toward the relief of Heraclea. Maximinus raised the siege to meet the threat, and battle was joined at Campus Serenus (the plain of the River Ergenus) near Hadrianopolis, on April 30. By superior tactics and through the exhaustion of Maximinus Daia's men, Licinius was victorious. At Constantine's request, and no doubt because Licinius would not have turned his back on such a successful talisman, his men went into battle with the Christian symbol painted on their shields, so once again the army of the Christian god had prevailed over the forces of paganism.

Maximinus fled the battlefield disguised as a slave. He paused only briefly at Nicomedia to gather up his family. While there, he issued an edict granting religious freedom along the same lines as the Edict of Milan. If the purpose of this was to rally support from the increasingly large Christian minorities, it failed to work. It might also have been a politically motivated move aimed at gaining support from a more important quarter—Constantine; if so, it also failed. With his family, he escaped across Anatolia to Cilicia to raise another army, hoping to close the Taurus passes to the pursuing Licinius behind him. The hastily constructed hill forts, however, did not stop Licinius, and by mid-summer Maximinus was surrounded by land and sea in the vicinity of Tarsus. There he died of his own hand by taking poison. Suitably for the second great persecutor, it was a lingering death because the poison was slow-acting, and gave him four days of agony before killing him.

Thus, the whole eastern half of the empire fell into the hands of Licinius. It is very doubtful that Constantine's Christian persuasion had swayed him greatly, and his actions following Maximinus's death were certainly not those of a charitable conqueror. With inhuman cruelty he ordered the deaths of all Maximinus's leading ministers and government officials. Then he turned on the family. Maximinus Daia's eight-year-old son and seven-year-old daughter were put to the sword, and their mother drowned by being thrown into the Orontes. As if to prove their wisdom in preferring the protection of Maximinus, Licinius executed Candidianus, the illegitimate son of Galerius, and

Severianus, son of the former emperor Severus. When she was later found hiding in Thessalonica, Galerius's wife Valeria too was put to death. Constantine had caused the end of the dynasty of *Heraclius* by peaceful methods, his colleague ended that of *Juvius* with a bloodbath.

CONSTANTINE AND BYZANTIUM SUPREME

[AD 313–364]

Constantine I the Great

Flavius Valerius Constantinus

[Caesar August 306; Augustus spring 307; sole December 19, 324 to May 22, 337]

Constantine changed the course of first-millennium history. Because of his policies Christianity was spread throughout the Roman empire, and thus became the faith that fired the Western world. The political expediencies that persuaded the ambitious emperor to embrace Christianity are largely forgotten. Nor did his conduct in later life always appear appropriate for a humble servant of Christ. But Constantine, by playing the religious card, united a fractured empire under one standard—the Chi-Rho.

The emperor who, as much as Diocletian, influenced the future course of the Roman empire, was born at Naissus (Nis) on February 27, in either 272–73 (although dates as late as 288 are also given. However, the earliest date must be more accurate, since he is recorded as fighting the Persians with Galerius in 298—unlikely if he was only ten or eleven at the time). When his father Constantius was appointed Caesar by Diocletian in 293 and made to marry Maximian's stepdaughter Theodora, Constantine and his divorced mother Helena were sent away to Byzantium.

Constantine was a military tribune at Diocletian's court at Nicomedia and fought alongside Galerius against the Sassanid Persians in 298 and the Sarmatae on the Danube in 299. His first wife, Minervina, bore him a son, Flavius Julius Crispus, and his second, Fausta, the daughter of Maximian, gave him three more sons: Flavius Claudius Constantinus (Constantine II), Flavius Julius Constantius (Constantius II), Flavius Julius Constans; and two daughters, Constantina and Helena the Younger.

With the death of Maximinus Daia in the late summer of 313, the empire was in the hands of Licinius, holding the Illyrian and eastern provinces, and Constantine, who held the rest—except for the still unresolved question of Maxentius's Italy. The following ten years of joint rule were destined to be stormy, and the fate of Italy was the first in contention. Christian writers put the blame on Licinius, but the

first breach was most certainly engineered by Constantine. It was his intention to create a buffer state between the two Augusti under the control of a Caesar, which would comprise the diocese of Italy and that of Pannonia, which Licinius had received on the death of Severus. Constantine installed his brother-in-law Bassianus, who had married his other half-sister Anastasia, with authority over Italy-Pannonia. Apart from the fact that this was a tacit seizure of Pannonia, territory Licinius considered his own to administer in accord with their agreement at Mediolanum, he correctly considered Bassianus to be nothing more than his rival's creature. Constantine's inclusion of Pannonia was probably designed to provoke a response, and it did. Licinius, via an intermediary called Senecio, instigated Bassianus to a military revolt against his imperial brother-in-law. But the plot was uncovered, and Bassianus arrested and executed. Constantine now demanded Licinius hand over the culpable Senecio, but he would not—a refusal that pointed to his complicity in the conspiracy.

Constantine determined on an invasion of the Balkans before Licinius could concentrate all his forces—several of his legions were still ensuring the security of the eastern provinces after the defeat of Maximinus Daia—and marched in the summer of 316 seeking to secure Pannonia at least. Licinius, however, managed to muster thirty-five thousand troops to face Constantine's force of twenty thousand, but despite his numerical superiority he was defeated at Cibalae on October 8, losing more than half his men. Licinius fell back through Sirmium to Serdica, where he proclaimed Aurelius Valerius Valens, commander of the Danube army, his imperial colleague and named him Augustus of the West. Valens concentrated all the remaining forces before Hadrianopolis and a second battle was fought at Campus Mardiensis in Thracia (probably Harmanli, Bulgaria), but its outcome was indecisive. Licinius then retreated northwest to Beroe (Stara Zagora), which placed his forces between the Danube and his rival, cutting Constantine's line of communication to Gaul. Licinius planned to pin Constantine in the Balkans until detachments from Anatolia could arrive and catch his enemy in a pincer maneuver. However, Constantine began an advance on Byzantium, threatening to occupy the city and block the Bosphorus with his fleet. It was a stand-off.

At Serdica on March 1, 317 Licinius agreed to a treaty, the terms of which were better for Constantine, at least in territorial gains. Except for Thracia all of Illyricum was ceded to Constantine and Licinius agreed to put Valens to death. In return, Constantine retreated from

the legislative powers of the senior Augustus and recognized the right of each Augustus to issue edicts within his own realm. Further, they agreed that neither emperor should enter his colleague's provinces except in the event of barbarian invasion. Although the coinage of both remained universal legal tender, in effect the Augusti had divided the empire into a Latin half in the West and a Greek half in the East. In a sign of outward unity, three new Caesars were elevated. Two were Constantine's sons, Crispus and Claudius Constantinus, the other was the illegitimate son of Licinius, whom Constantine had recognized during the conference at Mediolanum, named Valerius Licinianus Licinius after his father. None was old enough to have any real share in the power, Crispus was fourteen or fifteen the other two were mere infants.

A Truly Christian Quarrel

A full-scale civil war had been averted, and for the next six years an uneasy truce remained in place. The cause for estrangement and final warfare would be Christianity. Previous emperors had regarded the faith as divisive to national unity; Constantine was determined to use its power as a unifying movement, which could only be done by making Christianity, if not the whole of, at least a vital part of the state-religion. Since most of the army and the upper classes were convinced pagans, it was not practical to unite the Christian Church to the State, but he wanted to utilize its moral and economic advantages for the state's benefit. In 318 he issued an edict that added up to a constitution. It recognized the jurisdiction of the episcopal courts and, where by mutual agreement the litigants brought a case before the bishops, accorded their decision the same validity as that of the civil magistrates. The further steps toward a union of Church and State were not always smooth, as the Donatist schism indicates.

Schismatic activity within the Church was bound to annoy Constantine, who required a unified clergy whose authority was recognized by all, otherwise the partnership between Church and State would be undermined. As early as 313 the emperor had to arbitrate in Africa in what is known as the Donatist schism. Donatists argued that those Christians who had recanted or had given up sacred books to the Diocletianic inquisition were sinners or *traditores* (surrenderers), and that their readmittance to the communion should be qualified. They argued with the more tolerant over how far the Church should be a mixed body of sinners and the righteous.

The quarrel that resulted in Constantine's involvement occurred when Carthaginian Christians elected the arch-deacon Caecilian to the position of bishop vacated by the death of his predecessor. The rigorists alleged that Caelian had co-operated with the inquisition. Constantine hoped that the episcopal courts would settle the issue, but when the Donatists refused to accept the verdict in favor of Caecilian, he decided to retry the case himself. In 316 he rendered a verdict that concurred with the bishops' and ordered the expulsion of the Donatists from the Church. The disturbances that rocked Africa over the next four years forced Constantine to admit defeat, since he did not want to earn himself the reputation of a persecutor. Reluctantly, he extended tolerance to the heretics and so failed in his aim of unity within the Church.

Constantine began a massive program of religious building,

including a basilica for the pope on the site of what had been the camp of the mounted praetorian guard, and many other churches, among them the first St. Peter's. To the people he presented himself as the champion of Christians everywhere. Licinius by comparison, while bowing to the Christian ethic, remained essentially pagan in his personal pursuits and beliefs. Nevertheless, at first the unity of the Church was important to him, if only to keep the peace with Constantine. What changed his mind was a schism that promised to be more divisive than that of the Donatists to Constantine. A deacon and presbyter of Alexandria called Arius (c.250–336) had professed a heresy that had split the eastern arm of the Church in two. Under Bishop Alexander, the orthodox held that Christ was God, whereas Arius maintained that Christ was only "His Creature." The Arians held sway at the imperial court because Arius—after his expulsion by Alexander in 318—had become a confidant of the empress Constantia. Further, his follower the writer Eusebius of Nicomedia, probably a relative of the praetorian prefect Julianus, was supported by Licinius. At two synods convened at Licinius's order, one in Bithynia the other in Palestine, the orthodox view was denied and the teachings of Arius held to be in accordance with the Christian faith, and the reinstatement of Arius was demanded. Bishop Alexander's answer was to summon another synod at which Arius and his followers were excommunicated from the Catholic Church.

This open defiance of the emperor's wishes infuriated Licinius, who decided unification of Church and State was impossible to achieve. At the same time he could hardly be expected to tolerate the existence of such a powerful organization operating outside the state's control. In 320 he struck at the Church's power by forbidding the holding of any further synods, restricting the philanthropic activities of the clergy, and banning women from attending services with men. At the same time he began expelling Christians from the palace, army and the bureaucracy. Several men were even condemned to death for failing to comply with his edict. There was a secondary advantage to the expulsions of officials from their offices: Licinius was becoming increasingly convinced that the Christians in his service were spies for Constantine...he was almost certainly right, to some extent at least.

The recantation of Licinius brought about the final confrontation between the two halves of the empire. Since 317 Constantine and Licinius had held joint-consulships to symbolize their unity. In 321, as a calculated snub, Constantine nominated his two sons Crispus and

Constantinus, and in 322 held the consulship himself with his younger son. Licinius responded by assuming the consulship himself with his son. It was a breach of friendly relations, and both sides began martial preparations. In the same year Constantine was occupied by an invasion of Sarmatae in Pannonia, which he successfully repelled. And then, in 323, Goths entered Thraciae. Constantine used the invasion as an excuse to enter his colleague's domain, as by agreement under such circumstances he was entitled to do. Licinius, however, viewed it as an act of aggression and declared war in the spring of 324.

Constantine's army consisted of one hundred and twenty thousand infantry, ten thousand cavalry, and a fleet under the command of Crispus of some two hundred war-galleys and as many as two thousand transports. Licinius was able to muster an even larger army drawn from all the eastern provinces: one hundred and fifty thousand infantry and fifteen thousand cavalry, together with a powerful fleet stationed in the Hellespont. The numbers, however, did not benefit him, and he suffered a defeat at Hadrianopolis on July 3, 324 and fell back on Byzantium. Meanwhile, Crispus engaged the enemy fleet at the narrows of the Hellespont to force a way through toward the Bosphorus, and destroyed most of Licinius's ships.

With Byzantium cut off, Licinius crossed the Bosphorus to Chalcedon, and there repeated his exercise of a decade earlier by conferring the purple on his general Martius Martinianus, and ordered him to prevent Constantine from entering Bithynia. However Constantine outwitted Martinianus by landing where he was not expected, at the northern tip of the Bosphorus. On September 18 Licinius was brought again to battle at Chrysopolis (Uskudar) and defeated. He escaped to Nicomedia with thirty thousand men and sued for peace. Through the good offices of his wife and Constantine's sister, Constantia, his life and that of Martinianus were spared. Licinius was allowed to retire to Thessalonica as a *privatus*, but caught engaging in intrigue shortly after, Constantine had him executed. The same fate befell Martinianus, but young Licinius was spared—for the time being. For the first time in thirty-nine years, the Roman empire was in the hands of a single ruler.

Establishing the Holy Land

A domestic tragedy occurred in 326 that involved Constantine's first son and his wife, and was to leave the emperor wracked by guilt. The imperial family had gone to Rome to commemorate Constantine's *vicennalia*, and the *decennalia* of the elevation to the rank of Caesar of his sons Crispus and Constantius. Crispus was a popular figure since his victory over the fleet of Licinius, and high in his father's esteem. But Crispus was also the son of Constantine's first wife, Minervia, and aroused the jealousy of his step-mother Fausta on behalf of her own sons. After the celebrations, Crispus, who had been given command of the western provinces, left for Treveri, and —according to the histories—Fausta prepared her plot to bring him down.

Constantine had just issued a severe edict against sexual misconduct, and in this she saw her opportunity. One or two months later, when the family was reunited at Pola on the Histrian peninsula, Fausta accused Crispus of an adulterous attempt on her, and Constantine had his son executed. But Fausta's victory was short-lived. On the information of Constantine's mother Helena, Fausta was found guilty of a sexual affair with a slave, and condemned to death in accordance with the edict's suitable punishment by being thrust into a vat of boiling water. These are the bare facts offered by the histories—the matter was so sensitive that no record was made in the emperor's vast bureau, or none has survived. This burst of un-Christian cruelty seems so out of keeping with Constantine's character that it hints at far deeper motives than a simple case of inter-family jealousy, but if so, these are lost to time.

Some Christian writers claimed that it was the guilt he felt over these events that made Constantine turn to Christianity, but this is inconsistent with the facts; he was already a Christian in thought and actions (those immediately above excepted) if not yet by baptism. Over the vexatious question of the Donatists Constantine convoked a council of bishops from Galliae at Arelate in 314, which included Pope Silvester I (314–35), after which the Donatists asked for the emperor's own court to judge the matter. In thanking the clergy for attending, Constantine referred to the blessing God had conferred on him in showing him the errors of his past life and guiding him into the way of truth. This is written evidence of his conversion to Christianity at a time well before the tragic domestic events of 326.

The privileges extended to the episcopal courts in 318 are further evidence that Constantine regarded himself as Christian, even though

he avoided interfering with pagan cults until much later. In the year before the execution of Crispus, Constantine called a council of Church leaders at Nicaea (Iznik) to settle the division between orthodoxy and Arianism. The outcome of the Council of Nicaea was satisfactory in that Constantine managed to get the dissident parties to agree to a compromise, which should have guaranteed the unity of the Church—always the emperor's primary consideration. This was the *homo-ousion* or consubstantiality of the Son and the Father, and it was inserted into the Creed. Constantine could take satisfaction from a job well done. Unfortunately, it was not to remove the basic disagreement, despite Arius's willingness to accept the compromise.

It was, perhaps, an act of expiation for his hand in the executions of his son and Fausta that he donated all Fausta's property to the Church, and in penitence that Helena undertook her pilgrimage to the Holy Land shortly after. Her journey was remarkable in so far as few Christians to this point had taken much notice of Judaea as Christ's birthplace and the land of his mission. Local tradition held that Helena visited some sites because she knew them to be holy shrines, but having the mother of the empire's Christian ruler endorse their validity established the Holy Land as the essential place of pilgrimage. During her journey Helena proclaimed the Via Dolorosa and identified all fourteen Stations of the Cross. She also discovered the spot where Jesus fed the five thousand, preached his Sermon on the Mount, the place of the Annunciation, and Joseph's carpentry workshop. She is also said to have acquired several pieces of the True Cross, and thus founded the passion for hunting down relics. Helena did not merely visit as a tourist, she caused the building of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem and the Eleona Church on the Mount of Olives, which was the Mount of the Ascension. According to Eusebius of Caesarea, at the place of Jesus' crucifixion she started building the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, although this is usually credited to Constantine. Eusebius said:

She came, fired by... fervor, in order to know this land [and] explored it with remarkable discernment...and by her endless admiration for the footsteps of the Savior she granted those who came after her the fruits of her piety.

The great city that bore Constantine's name for more than a thousand years until its fall to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 was begun in 324, shortly after his victory over Licinius. It should be doubted that Constantine actually dedicated Constantinopolis to his own name,

or that he was building a city to supersede Rome in scope. He had spent many of his years in his western tetrarchic capital of Treveri, but all his impressionable youth at Byzantium. And he was aware that the West was now eclipsed in the imperial partnership. Trade and culture buzzed in the East, as Asia grew in importance. Making his new “tetrarchic” capital in the East was a logical step, and where better than the city that had nurtured his youth? More to the point, in contrast to Rome, this was to be the Christian capital of the world.

The new city was styled Roma Nova and probably only became known as Constantinopolis after the emperor’s death. However, it is convenient to refer to Byzantium as Constantinople from this point on. A massive building program began, greater even than Diocletian’s at Nicomedia, the effects of which Lactantius had compared to a barbarian raid. The principal construction took over six years and Constantinople was dedicated on May 11, 330. But even then the city lacked a proper water supply, which was only provided by the emperor Valens in about 373 in the form of aqueducts and conduits. The new city, at least four times larger than old Byzantium, surrounded a new forum and senate house. Constantine had the hippodrome of Septimius Severus remodeled and a magnificent palace built for his court, although Constantinople did not become a regular imperial residence until the end of the century.

Certainly Rome was to be snubbed and its prestige diminished, and as if to emphasize the point, the fragments of the True Cross brought back from Judaea by Helena were installed above the cupola of the triumphal arch known as the *Millon*—the First Milestone, a stub of which can still be seen today beside the later Julian cistern. From here all distances in the empire were now to be measured; no longer did all roads lead to Rome, Constantinople was literally the center of the world.

[27. Link to: Constantine Supreme](#)

[Family Tree: Tetrarchs & Constantine](#)

Constantine's Later Administration

In his government Constantine followed many of Diocletian's reforms, extending and refining rather than innovating. He adopted Diocletian's elaborate, oriental court ceremony and took to wearing a bejeweled diadem as the symbol of his exalted position. The separation of civilian and military commands was completed, and the division of the army between infantry and cavalry was formalized under two new senior commanders, the *magister peditum* (infantry) and the *magister equitum* (cavalry) who reported to the emperor through the *magister militum*.

Constantine also confirmed the lateral division of the army between the *ripenses* (the *limitanei* of former years, who manned the *limites*) and *comitatenses*, or frontier and mobile field troops. There is a perceptible ranking apparent between the prestige of these two types of soldiers because the *comitatenses* received a higher pay than the *ripenses*, a factor that would contribute to a steady decline in frontier morale in the years to come. The praetorian guards, demoted by Diocletian but reinstated by Maxentius, were abolished altogether as Rome's garrison, and replaced by units of the *scholae* cavalry. The military functions of the *praefecti praetorio* were removed and they joined the *vicari* as purely civilian administrators.

Constantine reorganized the structure of government under the *magister officiorum*, who controlled the *scrinia* (imperial bureau), which also included the *schola agentium in rebus*. This intelligence-gathering corps replaced the numerous free-lance agents of previous regimes, such as the *delatores*, *speculatores*, and *frumentarii* (as long-time grain collectors for the army, the *frumentarii* developed useful local contacts to gain intelligence and gradually became organized government agents). From this time on spies, or *agentes*, were under military discipline. The *comitatus* of Diocletian formed an important part of Constantine's council, in addition to the prefects, which he named the *sacrum consistorium*. In the past members of the emperor's *consilium* had sat with him, but now, as the Augustus seated himself, the councilors stood in his presence. The title *comes* (count) became attached to certain high offices, including the command of small regional armies of *comitatenses*. Although at first a *comes* was a member of the court, Constantine later freely bestowed the title as an honor to the deserving.

Religious toleration had been promised at Mediolanum: "Let no one molest another," Constantine had written. But the edict contained a

warning for pagans that the wise would do well “to be persuaded that purity and holiness can only be obtained by submission to the Holy Laws of God.” In 325 the solar image disappeared from coins to be replaced by the *labarum*, the Chi-Rho Christian monogram. At first there was no suppression of pagan temples, although the erection of statues of idols was forbidden and pagan festivals were banned. Later, imperial *agentes* began a concerted confiscation of the treasures of pagan temples and several, including the temple of Asclepius at Aegae and the shrine of Aphrodite at Aphaca in Phoenicia, were closed. Nevertheless, Constantine continued to let pagan officials serve in the administration, even as Christian bishops began to predominate, and he styled himself *Pontifex Maximus* until his death. Finally, he issued an empire-wide edict banning the holding of gladiatorial games, although the city of Rome continued to defy the command for the better part of a century.

Under Constantine, the regulation of the workforce begun by Aurelian and continued by Diocletian was made absolute; workers became virtual prisoners of their trade and their workplace. The lavish spending on new buildings and the increased army made heavy demands on the *fiscus*, and the emperor drew bitter criticism when he introduced a new tax called the *Chrysargyron* that fell on the senatorial class and town-dwellers. This was levied every four years and had to be paid—onerously—in gold or silver. The sixth-century Greek historian Zosimus noted that Constantine’s taxes were so excessive that fathers were forced to hire out their daughters as prostitutes to pay their debts. If this had really been the case, the worthies would have been breaking Constantine’s morality laws and faced severe penalties, so it is improbable that such extreme tactics were actually resorted to. But that the burden of taxation made all the classes groan certainly was the case.

He also established the base unit of gold currency, the *solidus*, at a lighter weight than the old *aureus* with a ratio of 72 coins to the pound, a value it retained for centuries. To achieve what had eluded previous emperors Constantine required large amounts of the precious metal. This was acquired by calling in and restriking coins that were already in circulation, but in addition the melting down of gold ornaments, largely seized from pagan temples; access to the Armenian mines that Diocletian’s eastern campaigns had made accessible, helped enormously.

The oriental splendor of his court exceeded that of Diocletian, the

emperor appearing with piled up false hair, often multi-hued, skillfully arranged by a team of stylists, above which he wore a diadem encrusted with pearls and valuable gemstones. He wore flowing robes of pure silk embroidered with flowers of gold, and where Diocletian's presumptions were to adorn the majesty of his position, Constantine's seemed more like an effeminacy so in contrast to his down-to-earth warrior youth. Gibbon summed up his last years by making the most invidious comparison in his lexicon: "In such apparel, scarcely to be excused by the youth and folly of Elagabalus, we are at a loss to discover the wisdom of an aged monarch and the simplicity of a Roman veteran." Later writers even suggested that Constantine dallied with Elagabaline homosexuality, but this is to be doubted and more likely should be credited to early Christian historians qualifying their admiration for the emperor in suspecting that it was not really Constantine but his mother Helena who was the real power behind the emergence of the Christian state.

Late Victories

Despite the apparent effeminacy of his court and his advancing years—he was about fifty-five—Constantine was still vigorous, and undertook several military campaigns on the frontiers. In 328 he moved the imperial court to Treveri, from which, with young Constantine, he supervised operations against the Alamanni. Late in 332 the Sarmatae appealed for help against a threatening invasion of the Goths, and young Constantine was sent to take command, while his brother Constantius, who had been raised to the rank of Caesar in 324, followed him. The Roman army crossed the Danube and inflicted a crushing defeat on the Goths, forcing them to accept Roman suzerainty. Two years later the Argaragantes, the major tribe of the Sarmatae broke faith with Rome, but a full-scale war was averted when the dependent tribe of Limogantes, who had been armed by Rome against another invasion of Goths, rose up against their masters. In panic as many as three hundred thousand Argaragantes surrendered to Constantine. Some of the men were enlisted in the army, and others were given land in the Balkans and northern Italy. This further barbarization of the empire nevertheless helped to secure peace along the Danube for more than a generation.

In 333 Constantine's youngest son Constans was raised to the rank of Caesar at the age of ten, and in 335 the emperor made a fourth Caesar of the *magister militum*, his nephew Flavius Dalmatius, a reward for putting down a usurper. This revolt took place in Cyprus, when an officer called Calocaerus had himself proclaimed Augustus. The circumstances that led to the rebellion are unknown, but Dalmatius swiftly repressed it, and put the usurper to death. Its significance to history is that it seems to have awoken a fear in Constantine over a smooth succession, and brought to his mind that young Licinius was residing quietly in Africa. Determined to remove any dynastic threat, Constantine resorted to a particularly vindictive—not to mention un-Christian—method. As the son of a slave-woman, Licinius was reduced to his mother's status and then arrested as a technical runaway. He was taken to Carthage and put to death there in the following year.

In the East the Persians were once again on the offensive. After a period of internal struggles a new king, Shapur II, had ascended the Sassanid throne in 310. For a space of twenty years he consolidated his position and then prepared to recover the territories ceded to Galerius. Alarmed at the possible threat to Syria, young Constantine was sent to assume control of the eastern legions. In 334 the

Sassanians kidnapped Tiran, the Arsacid king of Armenia, and carried him off to the Persian court, where he was brutally blinded. The Armenian nobles appealed to Constantine for help and, in response at their temerity in defying him, Shapur attacked in 335 and annexed Armenia. Recognizing the pointlessness of placing another Arsacid on the throne, Constantine appointed his nephew Hannibalianus, who was married to his eldest daughter Constantia, king of Armenia. Hannibalianus immediately force-marched his army into Armenia, where he surprised and routed the Persians in 336.

At this point the Roman empire was effectively divided into five military regions under the control of Constantine's three sons and two nephews: young Constantine ruled Galliae, Hispaniae, and Britanniae; Constantius Asiana and Oriens; Constans Italy, Africa, and the dioceses of Pannoniae and northern Moesia; Dalmatius received the remainder of the Balkans; and Hannibalianus ruled Armenia and Pontica. Of course, the supreme administration remained in the hands of the emperor. Early in 337, Constantine established himself at Nicomedia in preparation to co-ordinate the follow up to Hannibalianus's success in Armenia. It was there in May that he fell ill. Knowing that his death was near, the "Servant of God" took the final step in his religious conversion and at the age of about sixty-four received the sacrament of baptism. Constantine died on May 22, the Feast of the Pentecost, and he was laid to rest in the Church of the Holy Apostles in his city of Constantinople as the thirteenth of that illustrious number. However, the Roman senate—probably to appease the fury of the Roman mob that the emperor should be buried in the East—granted him divine honors, and so the first Christian emperor joined his pagan predecessors in the pantheon of Roman divinities.

His body was treated less kindly. Like any aspiring empire-builder Constantine had raised too many buildings too quickly with far too few skilled workers or decent materials. In consequence the jerry-built church began to suffer, and within only twenty-five years had fallen so far into disrepair that the dome was in danger of collapse, and the unpopular Patriarch Macedonius removed the emperor's body to the safety of St. Acacius the Martyr. To many, this was sacrilege, others seized the opportunity to attack Macedonius. In the ensuing riot several were killed and so many wounded that "the courtyard was covered with gore." Despite its sad state, the Church of the Holy Apostles continued to stand until 550, when Justinian had it completely rebuilt; but by that time no trace could be found of the

twelve sarcophagi or the great tomb of Constantine.

During his reign Constantine had unified the empire, secured the frontiers, and safeguarded the provinces from civil war. He had enhanced the prestige of Roman arms and completed the complex series of administrative and military reforms of Diocletian. On the debit side of the balance sheet, most inhabitants of the empire were neither happy nor prosperous. Ground down by taxes and condemned to the unremitting drudgery of compulsory service, most were no better than slaves of the State. The massive weight of imperial bureaucracy that would characterize the late Roman empire and that of the succeeding Byzantine empire in the East had now come into being, together with the evils of corruption through the choice of imperial favorites for the many offices established. Rome had lost its pre-eminence and the old gods were almost gone. The theocratic state left by Constantine was still the Roman empire, but one that Augustus could not possibly have recognized.

Constantine II

Flavius Claudius Constantinus

[Caesar March 1, 317; co-Augustus September 9, 337 to spring 340

Constantius II

Flavius Julius Constantius

[Caesar November 13, 324; co-Augustus September 9, 337 to November 3, 361]

Constans

Flavius Julius Constans

[Caesar December 25, 333; co-Augustus September 9, 337 to January 350]

Magnentius

Flavius Magnus Magnentius

[Usurper January 350–353]

All sons of the empress Fausta, Constantine II was born at Arelate in the summer of 316, Constantius II in Illyricum on August 7, 317, and Constans at some point between 320–23, either at Treveri or in Illyricum. Although he was the eldest of the brothers, Constantine II was to lead the shortest life, dying as a result of the sibling rivalry that was to dog the next fifteen years.

Fulfilling his gubernatorial duties in Asiana when news of his father's death reached him, Constantius was the closest to Constantinople and so the son who went to preside over the funeral. Here, the emperor's body lay in state inside the palace. Eusebius said it was "a marvelous spectacle such as no mortal had exhibited on earth since the world began." The problem for the *comitatus* was that Constantine may have created a pool from which to pick a successor, but he does not appear to have actually named which Caesar should have *imperium* over the others. In this uncertainty, the court ceremony continued in Constantine's name as if his death had not happened. The interregnum lasted for almost three months before the army made the decision. The soldiers everywhere proclaimed that they would only accept Constantine's sons, reigning jointly. Accordingly, on September 9, 337, Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans became co-Augusti.

In the weeks before his father's funeral, the grace and comportment of Constantius had greatly impressed Constantinople's aristocracy and citizens, but as soon as his father had finally been laid to rest he

discarded the polite mask and instigated a bloody sequel. The flimsy pretext was a written message allegedly found clenched in the deceased Constantine's fist accusing his two half-brothers, Dalmatius and Julius Constantius, of having poisoned him, and begging his sons to revenge him. However improbable this must have seemed, the people of Constantinople accepted it. Julius Constantius and his eldest son were cornered and both butchered a few feet from the palace steps, while Dalmatius was killed shortly after, together with his two sons, the Caesars Dalmatius and Hannibalianus, king of Armenia. Constantine's two brothers-in-law, many of his closest friends, senators and the praetorian prefect Ablavius met similar fates, even though the latter's daughter was betrothed to Constans.

Although this massacre was coordinated by Constantius, it seems obvious enough that the other brothers, at the very least, supported the dynastic cull, except perhaps Constans, who was only fifteen or sixteen. And by its effects, when all three brothers met at Viminacium (Kostolac) in the summer of 338 to divide the empire between them, they were the only living adult males of the immediate imperial family. The territorial distribution altered little and, with a few adjustments, they each retained the provinces they had held as Caesars: Constantine II held sway over Britanniae, Galliae, and Hispaniae; Constantius kept the eastern provinces and Egypt; while young Constans received the largest patrimony: Africa, Italy, the Illyrian dioceses, Macedonia, and Thraciae. This gave him the control of Constantinople, although in the event this was to be of little significance.

Unfortunately for the empire, none was the man his father had been. As the eldest, Constantine II attempted to exert his authority over the others, especially Constans, his closest neighbor and still little more than a child. Constans refused to submit to his will and late in 339 asked Constantius for his help in return for giving him authority over Constantinople. Constantine II then invaded Italy in 340, but Constans—proving that neither did he require the aid of Constantius, nor was he a less shrewd commander than his eldest brother—ambushed Constantine near Aquileia. Constantine II was slain during the battle and his body thrown into a river, and Constans assumed command of the western and central empire. However good a soldier he may have been, administrative responsibility was a quality the young man did not possess. Had he a spark of his father's imperial abilities, he might have made much of his huge realm, but brought up

in an autocratic court, the spoiled baby of the family, swamped by pomp and ceremony, he preferred to ally himself to the memories of Caligula, Nero, Commodus, and Elagabalus. The few duties he performed—including a visit to Britain in 343, the last legitimate Roman emperor to do so—were of little effect. It is true that his campaign of 341–42 against the Franks was successful, but with its conclusion he gave himself over to a life of depravity.

In the Pannonian governor Sextus Aurelius Victor's *History of the Caesars* Constans is described as “a leader in avarice” and as having “contempt for his soldiers.” This refers to his neglect of the frontier legions in preference to indulging himself with homosexual orgies that involved selected numbers of his blond German captives. For some seven years the army put up with its ruler's antics, but the evident discontent began to alarm Constans' chief ministers. By the end of 349 the army was on the brink of revolt. Matters came to a head at a dinner given on January 18, 350 at Augustodunum (Autun), when Constans was absent on a game hunt. In the course of the meal an officer of British extraction called Magnentius suddenly stood up wearing a purple cloak, and was proclaimed Augustus by his fellow officer-guests. Warned of the revolt, Constans fled, but was soon captured and killed on the spot where he was discovered.

The chaos this murder caused spread rapidly throughout the western dioceses. The Illyrian troops caught in the middle were uncertain whether to follow Magnentius or Constantius. Alarmed at the situation, the emperor's sister Constantia persuaded their venerable general, a man of humble Moesian origin who had served under Constantine the Great named Vetranio, to assume the title of Caesar and lead his men against the usurper. She wrote to Constantius, imploring him to back her choice, which it seems he did. He accepted Vetranio as a fellow ruler, although with what level of *imperium* is unclear, since he refused to send him any money or reinforcements.

Meanwhile, in the vicinity of Rome, Julius Nepotianus, the son of Constantine the Great's half-sister Eutropia, proclaimed himself emperor on June 3, 350 and attacked the city with a band of gladiators. Magnentius—cutting diamond with diamond—quickly moved against him, dispatching a force sufficient to overwhelm Nepotianus within twenty-seven days. The young man suffered the punishment for usurping a usurper by being beheaded and having his head paraded around Rome on the sharp end of a spear.

Although Constantius had his hands full battling the Sassanians, he could not ignore the threat that Magnentius posed, and detaching enough troops to make up a large army, he marched for the West. On his way he met with Vetranio at Serdica, and the two men moved on to Naissus. There, on December 25, 350, Constantius persuaded the Illyrian troops to reaffirm their oath to him, after which he stripped Vetranio of his temporary purple and allowed the old soldier to retire on a state pension for the remaining six years of his life. However, the unfolding events made it clear that he could not reclaim the West, let alone rule both halves of the empire on his own; he needed someone to look after the eastern dioceses and guard against Persia, and while encamped at Sirmium he ordered his young cousin Gallus from Constantinople to join him on the Danube, and there elevated him to the rank of Caesar.

[28. Link to: Constantine's Successors](#)

[Family Tree: Tetrarchs & Constantine](#)

Gallus

Claudius Constantius Gallus

[Caesar March 15, 351 to 354; in the East]

Gallus, youngest of the three children of Julius Constantius (half-brother of Constantine I through Constantius Chlorus) and Galla was born in 325–26 at Massa Veternensis in Etruria, northern Italy. He is described as blond-haired and handsome, but of an intemperate character. His mother died at some point before 331, by which time Julius Constantius's second wife, Basilina, had also died giving birth to his half-brother Flavius Claudius Julianus (Julian). His sister had become the first wife of Constantius II in about 335 and her passing may have facilitated her father's fall. Gallus escaped the massacre of 337 that took both his father and elder brother Julian because he was thought to be suffering from a terminal illness.

It is possible that Gallus was entrusted to the care of Eusebius the bishop of Nicomedia in company with his younger half-brother Claudius Julian. Here, and later at Macellum in Cappadocia, the two boys were given a spiritual and classical education as befitted their status, and the six-year sojourn is described as pleasant. Macellum had originally been the palace of the kings of Cappadocia, and by Roman standards it was probably not luxurious, but the estate's proximity to the bustling entrepôt of Caesarea (Kayseri) meant that it was hardly isolated. Julian, however, later noted that Gallus possessed a violent streak, which he attributed to their "forced stay" at Macellum.

Gallus was aged about twenty-five when he was called to Sirmium in March 351 to receive the rank of Caesar from Constantius and the hand of the emperor's sister Constantina, to whom Constantine I had given the title Augusta when she married Hannibalianus. The marriage was meant to ensure the loyalty of Gallus, but it was also an effective snub to Magnentius, who himself had sought to wed Constantina in order to legitimize his usurpation and make an alliance with Constantius. It might even have been a way of removing his meddlesome sister from the volatile West and allowing her to vent her political aspirations by controlling the young and inexperienced Caesar. In any event, the arrangement between the rulers was not to be a successful one, and this was more the fault of Constantius than Gallus. According to Julian, the emperor's jealousy of Gallus began the moment he proclaimed him Caesar. Constantius made the choice of his ministers for him, and appointed his praetorian prefect, Thalassius, and *quaestor sacri palatii*, Montius Magnus.

After the ceremonies, as Constantius left Sirmium to face Magnentius, Gallus went to Antioch, visiting his young half-brother in Nicomedia on the way. The meeting of Gallus and Julian, when it reached the ears of Constantius aroused his suspicions, but he was a man who naturally suspected everything and every person. However, the emperor had no time to dwell on domestic matters because Magnentius had used the time well and crossed from Gaul into the Balkans. The armies met on September 28, 351 at Mursa (Osijek), where Gallienus had crushed the usurper Ingenuus, and where Magnentius suffered a similar fate. However, he managed to escape with a part of his force and return to Gaul to begin gathering another army.

Hoping to confound Constantius, Magnentius then conspired to assassinate Gallus. He sent one of his servants to Antioch with money enough to bribe some of Gallus's guard. But the plot leaked because the woman in whose home Magnentius's envoy lodged overheard the conspirators' unguarded discussions. She went to the palace and informed Constantina, and Gallus had the messenger and soldiers arrested, tortured, and executed. If the plot was intended to throw Constantius into confusion it failed in its purpose. The emperor pursued Magnentius, and after several inconclusive skirmishes, finally defeated him at Lugdunum in 353, after which Magnentius fell on his own sword.

Gallus had been more than usually vulnerable to assassination because his *magister peditum* Ursicinus had been sent to crush a rebellion of Jews in Palestine that had started in the space of time between Constantius's removal of himself to defeat Magnentius and Gallus's arrival in Antioch. As one history recorded:

Through the murders of many thousands of men—even those too young to pose a threat—Gallus [that is Ursicinus in his name] suppressed the Jews, who, having murdered soldiers at night, had seized arms for the purpose of rebellion. And he put to the torch their cities Diocaesarea, Tiberias and Diospolis, and many towns.

In addition, Gallus is credited by some sources with many successes against the Sassanians, but this is improbable for one very good reason. Shapur II had concluded a treaty with Constantius in 350 and had withdrawn from Nisibis in order to check a series of nomadic incursions on his eastern borders. Dealing with this threat meant that there was an uneasy peace on the Romano-Sassanid border during Gallus's reign as Caesar, so it is unlikely he had need to undertake any

military campaigns.

Gallus fell foul of the senatorial class of Antiochia when—after Theophilus, the *corrector* of Syria, opposed his move to lower the price of grain—he aroused the anger of the mob against the nobility. Theophilus was taken out and butchered, and street rioters put many houses of the wealthy to the torch. There then followed a series of trials engineered through *agentes* against innocent victims of Gallus and Constantina's jealousy. Several senators were executed and their estates confiscated, while Gallus roamed the streets at night in disguise soliciting passersby for their opinion of their Caesar. His actions against the nobility pleased the mob and Gallus furthered his popularity with many games and races at the hippodrome.

The praetorian prefect Thalassius did nothing to restrain Gallus's violence, but he kept suspicious Constantius informed of the Caesar's every move. When Thalassius died of natural causes in 353, Constantius hastened to appoint a certain Domitianus as the successor before Gallus should take the matter into his own hands, and sent him to Antioch to ensure a continued watch on his cousin. Constantius feared that the excesses of Gallus might precipitate open rebellion in Syria at a time when he was still facing a serious situation along the Rhine as a result of Constans' neglect and Magnentius's depletion of frontier troops. But Gallus, enraged by the haughty Domitianus, ordered Montius Magnus to see to his death. Montius pointed out that in executing the prefect Gallus would be exceeding his authority. As the story goes, Constantina strode up to the quaestor and "dragged down Montius from his judgment-seat with her own hands," and with the consent of Gallus the soldiers killed both men.

However, there may have been a more cogent reason for the two deaths. Soon after his arrival in Antioch Domitianus had dispatched his son-in-law Apollinaris, who had been in charge of the management of the palace at Antioch, to Mesopotamia, where there was a large concentration of troops in winter quarters. The later discovery of an imperial robe at Tyrus (Tyre) was connected to Apollinaris's father. And Montius was associated with two *tribuni fabricarum*, officers of the armory, named Epigonus and Eusebius, who had promised arms in the event of a revolution, and whose names Montius offered up under torture. Putting these disparate pieces together suggests a palace conspiracy that Gallus had no alternative but to defuse. The *magister equitum* Ursicinus was recalled from Nisibis to preside over the treason trials of Epigonus, Eusebius, and Apollinaris. Gallus then appointed

the half-brother of his mother, Vulcacius Rufinus, as his new prefect. At the time, the spring of 354, Constantius was engaged in a campaign against the Alamanni when he heard of the treason trials and the execution of his appointee. Furious at being thwarted, he ordered the replacement of Rufinus by another of his men, Volusianus Lampadius, and determined on the removal of Gallus. After concluding a peace with the barbarians, he retired to Mediolanum and requested the presence of Gallus and Constantina there.

It appears that from Athens, where he was residing, Claudius Julian tried to warn his half-brother of the emperor's real intentions, but Gallus was finally lured into journeying to meet Constantius for what he believed to be his elevation to co-Augustus. He may still have been saved had not Constantina died of a fever as they traveled through Bithynia, thus severing his legal connection to Constantius and losing in his wife his best supporter. As a precaution, Constantius removed all the troops along the route Gallus was taking, and so when he reached Poetovio (Ptuj) near the border of Pannonia with Noricum, he had only a few guards available to him, and was easily arrested by a corps of troops under the command of an officer called Barbatio, accompanied by the *agens in rebus* Apodemius.

Gallus was stripped of his imperial robes by Barbatio and dragged to Pola in Histria where he was interrogated about the treason trials and deaths of the officials. Unwisely, he laid all the blame for these events on the ambitions of his dead wife, which news so enraged Constantius that he condemned Gallus to summary execution; he was only twenty-nine. The emperor then turned to Gallus's half-brother.

Julian the Apostate

Flavius Claudius Julianus

[Caesar November 6, 355; Augustus spring 360 to June 26, 363]

Claudius Julian's father, Julius Constantius, was the younger of the two sons born to Constantius Chlorus by his second wife Theodora. The family had been obliged to live in exile, albeit a comfortable one, due to Theodora's arch enemy, the Augusta Helena, Constantine's mother. However, after Helena's death, Constantine invited Julius Constantius to return to Constantinople and reinstated him in his affections. It was here in May or June 332 that his third son Julian was born to his second wife, Basilina. As has been related, when Constantius II caused the murders of Gallus's father Julius Constantius and his older brother Julian in 337, Gallus and his young half-brother Claudius Julian were spared.

Julian was sent to Nicomedia to be tutored by Bishop Eusebius and brought up as a good Christian. It is generally assumed that Gallus accompanied him, but if it was so it may not have been for the whole period, since the historian Socrates claims that Gallus was studying at Ephesus, where he had inherited property, when Constantius had him exiled to Macellum. So when Eusebius was translated to the see of Constantinople in 339, it was probably only Julian who went with him to the capital. Eusebius died in 341 and in 342 Constantius sent the ten-year-old Julian and seventeen-year-old Gallus to Macellum, where they remained in effective isolation for six years before Gallus was recalled to become Caesar in 349. Julian, however, was ignored, for which fact he was very happy. Free to do as he pleased, he spent the next six years wandering the Greek world in search of every philosophical school he could find.

When he returned to Nicomedia he enrolled at the school of Libanius, a philosopher who had rejected Christianity and proclaimed himself a proud pagan. From Nicomedia Julian traveled first to Pergamum, then Ephesus, and finally to Athens in the early summer of 355. During these wanderings he gradually became convinced that he must reject Christianity and return to the ways of the old Roman gods. Nevertheless, he was too astute to avow his faith openly, especially with the uncertain temper of his cousin Constantius II all too evident. Having voiced his fears to Gallus that Constantius was his enemy, he must have watched from afar with some horror as the events in late summer of 354 unfolded in Illyricum and his half-brother was executed. Julian now lived in dread, burying himself in his scholastic

studies and hoping to remain ignored. But the removal of Gallus had not solved any problems of government for Constantius. The empire was still too large for one man to rule, and Julian was the only surviving relative of Constantine. So it was, in the summer of 355, when he was just into his twenty-fourth year, that Julian received the imperial summons to attend Constantius in Mediolanum.

Constantius did not hold his young cousin in any affection. The Christian bias of St. Gregory of Nazienzen, a fellow-student of Julian's in Athens, paints an exaggerated but essentially correct picture in describing him: "...that oddly disjointed neck, those hunched and twitching shoulders, that wild, darting eye, that swaying walk, that haughty way of breathing down that prominent nose...." Julian, deprived of any company of his own age and bookish, was a shy and socially dysfunctional young man whose speech was halting and whose laughter when provoked was described as being "nervous and uncontrolled." Disdainful of his scholarship, Constantius had his student beard shaved, his long hair cut in short trooper style, his out-of-condition body stuffed into a military uniform and, on November 6, paraded him before the troops to acclaim him as Caesar.

A few days later Julian married Constantius's second sister, Helena the Younger, in order to cement the alliance between the two men. For his part, Julian had no reason to love his cousin and emperor. Aged just five at the time of his father's death, he had only later discovered the part Constantius had played in that murder, and he feared that unless he trod very warily, he would soon suffer the same fate as Gallus. By contrast, Constantius felt he had little to fear from Julian, who had absolutely no military experience and would therefore behave perfectly as was intended, a figurehead of the emperor. He was dispatched rapidly to the diocese of Galliae with, as Libanius later put it, "the authority to do nothing save wear the uniform." As he had done with Gallus, Constantius appointed all Julian's ministers and generals on his behalf, confident that they would win the war against the Alamanni.

But Constantius had seriously underestimated the wandering scholar. When Julian discovered that his praetorian prefect and *magister equitum* were reporting directly to Constantius and not to him, he quickly perceived that this was a deliberate attempt to diminish his authority rather than a perfectly sensible arrangement in view of his lack of civilian administration and military experience. Julian was a conscientious student in all he undertook, and made it his business to

learn soldiering fast.

So it was that the successful lightning campaign of 356 resulted as much from his efforts as those of his cautious generals. On December 1, 355, Julian, who was in Augusta Taurinorum (Turin), learned that the Franks had captured Colonia Agrippina. However, his first priority was the Alamanni, who had occupied large parts of Galliae. He moved to Vienna (Vienne in France) for the winter. From there in the spring, the army swept through Augustodunum (Autun), Tricasini (Troyes), Durocortorum (Reims), and Mediomatrici (Metz), clearing the Alamanni before it. Julian then pushed the enemy through the Vosges. From here he turned north and retook Colonia Agrippina. In the following year he won a great victory over the Alamanni near Argentorate (Strasbourg). In this battle thirteen thousand Romans faced more than thirty thousand Alamanni, and left over six thousand dead on the field for a loss of only two hundred and forty-seven legionaries. By 359 Julian had recovered the length of the Rhine frontier and spent time supervising the repair and extension of the fortifications. While this was being done, he made his new capital on the Sequana (Seine) at Lutetia Parisiorum (Paris).

Julian did more in this period than command his army. He proved to be an able administrator and became widely liked for correcting the injustices of Constantius's appointees. Two instances point to his popularity with the provincials. The first is a commendation from Hilary, the bishop of Limonum Pictonum (Poitiers), that praises Julian as an able representative of the emperor to the Gallic provincials. The second is the epigraphic evidence of an inscription found near Beneventum in Apulia, which reads: "To Flavius Claudius Julianus, most noble and sanctified Caesar, from the caring Tocius Maximus, *vir clarissimus*, for the care of the *res publica* [Republic] from Beneventum."

The Chain-Crowned Emperor

Meanwhile, on the eastern front Constantius was having a much less happy time. Fractious border skirmishes had escalated to the point that in 359 Shapur II sent an embassy to the emperor demanding the return of Mesopotamia and Armenia which had been “fraudulently extorted from my grandfather.” If the ambassadors were to return empty-handed, he threatened, he would take to the field as soon as the winter was past. He was as good as his word, and toward the end of the year captured the key fortress of Amida (Diyarbakir), which controlled the headwaters of the Tigris and the approaches to Cappadocia. Before the year was out, Sassanian forces had built a strong position in Mesopotamia and were threatening fortified Nisibis and the province of Osrhoene.

Constantius reviewed his situation and decided that he needed reinforcements, and so in January 360 Julian in Lutetia received the demand that he strip his army of three hundred men for every unit under his command, plus four *auxilia* of Gallic and Frankish allies. Apart from the obvious fact that to comply would reduce his strength by a half, he had promised his Gallic detachments that they would never have to serve in the East. This situation had obtained before along the Danube, when the settled soldiers were asked to abandon their homes, wives, and families to the mercy of barbarians across a weakly defended frontier. And the outcome was the same: the troops refused.

For his part, Julian later claimed in a letter to the Athenians that he had no desire to disobey the emperor’s command, and even went so far as to encourage the men with the riches that awaited their victory in the East. He promised that their families would be transported with them at public expense. But these entreaties failed to calm the aroused spirit of the troops, who vilified Constantius as unfit to rule them. Julian apparently retired to his chambers, but was disturbed in the night to be told the army was marching on the palace. According to his own words, he prayed to Jupiter and was told by the god to accept the diadem. By this time Julian had enjoyed five years of growing experience and become not merely a good general, but one of Rome’s finest. His years of secretive worship had also convinced him that it was his destiny to restore the empire to the old Roman gods, and he was at the head of an army whose soldiers were still mostly pagans. There was no alternative. According to Ammianus Marcellinus—an officer in one of the *scholae* and one of the best sources for the period

—since no suitable object to act as a crown could be found, the standard-bearer of a legion removed the great gold chain that was the insignia of his office from his shoulders and placed it on Julian's head. It was late February or early March of 360 and he was not yet twenty-eight.

Ammianus Marcellinus was to be the effective chronicler of this period; his motto: "The language of truth is unadorned and always simple." Most knowledge of his background is obtained from autobiographical references in his *Res Gestae*. However, it does not offer us a place or date of birth. It is variously assumed that he came from Antiochia, Alexandria, or Thessalonica, and he calls himself a "Greek." He tells us that he was an *adolescens* in 357, and so must have been born sometime before 338. In his twenties, he joined the army as *protector domesticus* on the staff of Ursicinus, *magister equitum* in the East. This appointment suggests that Ammianus was of a family enjoying high rank, since he was too young to have built a distinguished military career that the position usually required. Although he did not always agree with Julian's actions, their bookish interests cemented a mutual empathy. And it is clear that Ammianus preferred literary pursuits to those of soldiering when he tells us that "I was now overcome with excessive walking, to which as a gentleman [*ingenuus*] I was not accustomed."

For a year little happened. Julian was uncertain about how to proceed—and to an extent his hands were tied by the promises he had made to so many of his Gallic troops—and Constantius was unable to. Negotiations between the two emperors became acrimonious. Constantius did manage to stir up trouble among the Alamanni, but this only ensured that Julian was even more tied to his frontier, so it was not a particularly effective tactic. His concern over what Constantius might do also held him back when news of an invasion of northern Britain by Scots and Picts arrived during 360. Fearing in the face of the Alamanni to leave Gaul himself, he sent his *Magister Equitum* Lupicinus to handle the barbarian raiders. Peace in the diocese was essential, for by this time, Ammianus informs us, British grain was as essential to the Gallic provinces as Egyptian and African was to Italy. Lupicinus took a force made up from Heruli and "Bataviani" (Salian Franks), together with two units detached from Moesian legions. Ammianus fails to report the outcome, but evidently the marauders were repulsed and peace re-established.

And then in 361 the stalemate broke. Some success in the East

against the Sassanians had led to a lull in the war and Constantius took advantage to detach units and head for the West. Because of his promise, and because of his unwillingness to denude the frontier garrisons, the army Julian could call on was pitifully small, only some twenty-three thousand troops. Since he was also uncertain how loyalties lay in northern Italy and along the Danube, he decided to split his army into three separate forces to make his strength appear greater than it really was. Ten thousand would cross the Alps into Italy and, via Aquileia, enter Illyricum. A similar number was to march through Raetia and Noricum, while Julian took three thousand to the upper Danube and then sailed downriver to meet the two other contingents at Sirmium. Julian was the first to arrive and, impatient to push on, took his small force to Naissus (Nis), where he decided to pass the winter. He had been there for approximately four weeks when astonishing news arrived from Constantinople. Constantius was dead, and Julian had been proclaimed by the armies of the East.

Julian had won his bloodless victory by the hand of fate. Constantius had moved from the Syrian frontier to Antioch and was setting out to cross Anatolia when he was stricken by a fever and died at the small village of Mopuscrenae on November 3, 361. He was just forty-four years old. On Julian's orders Constantius's body was taken to Constantinople in state, and the emperor himself attended to the obsequies on December 11 and led the mourning for his enemy, we are told, with every sign of genuine sadness. Constantius was laid to rest beside his father Constantine the Great in the Church of the Holy Apostles; it was the last time that Julian was to set foot in a Christian church.

The inauguration of Julian's reign was not, however, entirely without incident. During the last weeks of December 361, the emperor convened a military tribunal at Chalcedon—on which he did not himself serve—to try several of Constantius's former ministers. Ammianus was gloomy about the fate of those tried because the judges "...oversaw the cases more vehemently than was right or fair, with the exception of a few...." Some were acquitted, many were banished, and a few were executed, including the two chief agentes of Constantius's intelligence network, who were sentenced to be buried alive. Ammianus was particularly distressed at the treatment meted out to Ursulus, Constantius's *comes sacrum largitionum*, who had previously served with distinction as Julian's finance minister in Gaul before being transferred to the East. Ursulus had passed a remark

disparaging the eastern army's inefficiency during the siege of Amida in Mesopotamia Superior. The soldiers had not forgotten it and now demanded Ursulus's head. Although he was not a member of the tribunal, the emperor could have intervened to save his old friend, and that he did not do so disappointed Ammianus and many other of Julian's admirers.

[29. Link to: Julian and Old Gods](#)

[Family Tree: Tetrarchs & Constantine](#)

Restoration of the Old Gods

Julian was a very different emperor to those of the Diocletianic courts and the family of Constantine. After the recent death of his wife, Helena the Younger, he remained celibate, austere in his wishes for comfort, and had shown little interest in food or wine. His purge of the imperial court was swift and extraordinarily thorough. Libanius describes how the imperial cortège had grown exponentially since the time of Diocletian:

There were a thousand cooks, as many barbers, and even more butlers. There were swarms of lackeys, the eunuchs were more in number than flies around the flocks in spring...

Of the thousands of chamberlains, major-domos, and drones, none remained when Julian was finished, and he furnished himself with little more than a skeleton staff.

Julian's reforms of religion and government were equally ambitious, and seemed to be oriented toward an older Republican tradition. He gave greater powers to the senate, which he studiously attended, walking on foot as a sign of respect. He was assiduous in hearing judicial matters, and made steps to reform the bureaucracy where he detected a decline in administrative or moral standards. In one instance he noted that in Illyricum, at least, the *vicari* had been rendered ineffective because *correctores* and *praesides* were reporting directly to the praetorian prefect, and on June 6, 362, he issued an edict banning governors from bypassing their *vicarius*. He also imposed penalties on governors who purposefully delayed appeals in court cases they had heard. With a non-existent imperial *comitatus*, Julian relied heavily on the senate and consulars to act as intermediaries between emperor and his subjects, which again gave more power and prestige to the old upper classes of Constantinople.

There is some question that Julian's apostasy was rapid, any more than Constantine's conversion had been. However, there is no doubt that by the time he had become sole ruler of the empire the process was complete. Consequently, the people who suffered the most were the Christians. But Julian had no intention of reverting to the days of persecution, perhaps because at heart he was a merciful man, mostly because he had learned that martyrs seemed to have an opposite effect on the Christian Church to that intended. He repealed the decrees by which the pagan temples had been closed down and their sacrifices declared illegal, and issued an edict of religious tolerance, exactly as Constantine had done, but of course with the opposite effect. And then

in a masterstroke, he offered an amnesty to all the orthodox churchmen who had been exiled under Constantius's pro-Arian government. Ammianus noted that Julian had found by experience "that no wild beasts are so hostile to men as are Christian sects in general to one another." He hoped that after the opposing leaders had shown their viciousness to one another, the mass of Christians would see the error of their ways and return to the old religion.

There was far more to his dislike of Christianity than that it had made adherents among honest Romans. From his own writings it is clear that he held Christianity to be the single culprit for the ills of the empire. Instead of Constantine's unity of Church and State binding emperor and people, Julian saw only an effete creed that insidiously robbed Romans of their solid virtues by preaching the feminine qualities of meekness, gentleness, and charity. No wonder the army was barely capable any longer of manning the frontiers if Christian fifth-columnists were telling the soldiers to turn the other cheek. It was, of course, a simplistic view—as late as the fifth century Mithras remained the preferred deity of the frontier troops. However, the lessons of Maximinus Daia were not lost on Julian, and he made plans to organize the soon-to-be-revived pagan cults along Christian lines: charitable and social institutions like those offered by the Christian churches would be founded for the support of widows, orphans, and the sick. But none of this came to pass, for paganism seemed in no hurry to revive.

The Fateful Invasion of Persia

In the summer of 362 Julian moved his austere court to Antioch in preparation for war against Persia. In the six weeks he traveled across Anatolia he discovered to his dismay that the Christians were not tearing each other apart. Indeed, relaxing again after the initial fear of persecution had faded, the many Christian communities he passed appeared to be flourishing, while those of the pagans seemed to be no stronger than in Constantine's day.

Julian had already aroused the irritation of the populace of Constantinople with his continual impassioned speeches on the subject of Neo-Platonism in the marketplaces and the forum. Now, as he progressed at a leisurely pace, he stopped at every temple on the route, detouring when necessary, to officiate at one sacrifice after another until he earned the nickname "the butcher." Desperate to compete, Julian demanded of the pagan priesthood that it must adopt a Christian lifestyle: no priest was to go to a tavern, frequent the theater, or engage in a base profession.

Still nothing worked, and so on June 17, 362 he promulgated an edict with far-ranging consequences. It banned any Christian from acting as a teacher of rhetoric or literature. His reasoning was that no Christian who professed to teach the classics—in those days, virtually the whole of the school curriculum—could be of the required moral standard, since he was teaching something he did not himself believe in. With the future of the empire's education in doubt, and with hot-headed young Christians willing to flirt with martyrdom, tensions ran high. Then the emperor reached Antioch and became immediately immersed in planning for the imminent Persian campaign, and any further tightening of the screw was postponed until his return from the war. Fortunately for the Christians he did not.

Between 350–58 Shapur had been occupied with nomadic raids and incursions on his eastern borders, and so an uneasy peace had existed between Sassanid Persia and Constantinople. But in 359, after the prolonged siege of Amida (Diyarbakir) that had prompted Ursulus's unfortunate remarks, the fortress fell into Shapur's hands. Since then there had been a dangerous build up of Persian troops in Mesopotamia Superior, and Julian was conscious that he would have to act if the situation was not to become worse. The army set out from Antioch on March 5, 363. Using his trademark whirlwind strategy, Julian force-marched to Beroea (Aleppo) and on to Hieropolis (Membij), then slightly north to cross the Euphrates into Mesopotamia

at Zeugma (Barak). By March 27 the army was all on the eastern side of the river, following its course southward, and Julian had constructed a flotilla to guard his supply line. His generals Procopius and Sebastianus were sent to help Arsaces, the client king of Armenia, to guard the northern Tigris line. By April 7, after a few minor skirmishes and some sieges but without any serious trouble, the Roman army was on the west bank of the Tigris a short way north of Ctesiphon. Here, Sassanian resistance began to tell, and drawn up between the river and the city walls a Persian army stood ready for battle.

The Romans crossed the Tigris on May 29 and, despite having to fight their way across and form up on the opposite bank, were victorious. But it availed Julian nothing. His engineers advised that the siege would be drawn out and time was not on their side. The retreating Persians had scorched the earth to deny the Romans supplies, and the marshy ground, crisscrossed with canals and irrigation ditches between the two rivers, was badly flooded. The soldiers, close to starving, were further demoralized by squelching from one quagmire to another, while being tormented by swarms of flies so thick that, according to Ammianus, they blocked out the sky. Worse, scouts reported that a far larger army under Shapur's command was approaching. Julian's ambitions for glory were frustrated and we are told that in his anger he had his fleet burnt. However, this act was less one of petulance than of common sense, for it would have struggled to sail upstream, and leaving it behind would only benefit the Sassanians. Julian ordered the retreat on June 16. As the Romans trudged along the east bank of the Tigris they were constantly harassed by Persian horsemen. During a particularly heavy attack on June 26 the emperor dashed out without his armor to rally his men and was struck in the abdomen by a Persian spear. His officers carried him back to his tent, but he was too severely wounded to survive and died shortly after.

At his death Julian was only just thirty-one and had been on the throne for a little over three years. In that time he achieved no legislation of any significance and wasted much of it attempting to revive a dying religion of confused parameters. It was, though, another case of an untimely death robbing the empire of a man who might well have become one of its finest rulers. His outstanding qualities—education, energy, an ability to inspire his soldiers, integrity, and incorruptibility—were let down by his faults. His

religious fanaticism blinded Julian to the priorities needed for good government, and his hesitancy—seen in continually asking the gods for guidance instead of making his own decisions—turned into inflexibility once the divine course had been laid out for him. And with his passing, the line of Constantius Chlorus came to an end. Where would the empire go from here? The immediate answer was something of a joke, more of a comma in history than a full-stop.

Jovian

Flavius Jovianus

[Augustus June 27, 363 to February 16, 364]

Ammianus Marcellinus, who had so ably commented on the reign of Julian, gives a graphic explanation for the proclamation of Jovian as the next emperor. He was born at some point in 331 at Singidunum (Belgrade). His father Varronianus had a distinguished career under Constantius II and his father-in-law Lucillianus had commanded the army against the Sassanians in 350. These factors more than his own abilities seem to have given him preferment, and Jovian had risen to become *primicerius domesticorum* of the imperial guard, the *scholae*. He was a well-liked, genial soldier of bluff temperament, and a Christian. He had, however, no particular qualities to recommend him as a ruler. The beleaguered Roman army commanders had little time for discussion, surrounded as they were by Sassanid forces the morning after Julian's death. Their first choice was the praetorian prefect of the eastern provinces, Sallustius Secundus, but he declined the purple on the grounds of his advanced age and a growing infirmity. At that point, a small group of the *scholae* began to shout for their commander. Ammianus claims that the assembled army took up the acclamation, but by a dreadful mistake the men mistook the cry "Jovianus!" to be "Julianus!" because they thought their former emperor had recovered from his injury. The error became evident when the tall figure of Jovian was paraded before them, by which time it was too late to back down.

Under Jovian's uninspired leadership, the weary army continued its dreary northward retreat along the east bank of the Tigris under renewed Sassanian harassment. Eventually the Romans made a forced crossing of the Tigris and, while he was still in a position of strength, Shapur offered terms to the new emperor. These were extremely unfavorable to Jovian, but he felt there was no option but to accept them. In return for being allowed an orderly retreat, Rome ceded territories in northern Mesopotamia, including five satrapies along the upper Tigris, five Roman frontier forts, including the two key strongholds Nisibis (Nusaybin) and Singara (Sinjar), and all the land to the east of them. Jovian also bound the Romans to a promise not to assist Armenia against Persian attack, effectively renouncing any claims over the client kingdom. The army was furious at these degrading terms and blamed Jovian for what had really been Julian's fault. But the troops still faced a hundred-mile march to safety across

the desert, and without much in the way of supplies, since Shapur refused to offer any provisions as a part of the treaty. The only benefit Jovian gained was a promise of peace for thirty years.

During the trek from the Tigris to Hatra and Nisibis, the desert almost finished Shapur's abandoned task. Only by killing all their camels did the troops survive to limp on to Nisibis, where Jovian refused to enter a city he had promised to Shapur. The exhausted remnant of the army was given a few days to recover before continuing to Antioch. During the rest, Julian's embalmed body was given into the hands of Procopius who, operating along the northern Tigris line, had avoided the debacle following Julian's withdrawal from Ctesiphon. He was a kinsman and old friend of the deceased emperor, and some said Julian had secretly appointed Procopius to succeed him. Procopius took the body for burial at Tarsus, where Julian had intended to establish his court. At Antioch Jovian issued an edict of religious tolerance, which was received by the Christians in great relief—they, at least, were happy with the pagan tyrant's removal.

Jovian left Antioch in mid-October, taking the army in easy stages through Anatolia, greeted at every stop by cheering Christian communities. On the first day of January 364 he assumed the consulship with his infant son Varronianus at Ancyra (Ankara) before moving on to the small town of Dadastana, half way to Nicaea. There, on the morning of February 16, Jovian was found dead in his bedroom. The emperor was fond of his food and wine, and the mushrooms he had eaten the night before were suspected by some, while others blamed the fumes of an untended charcoal brazier in his bedchamber, from which he had suffocated. No one, however, suspected foul play. Jovian had been emperor for only eight months.

VALENTINIAN AND THE THEODOSIAN DYNASTY

[AD 364–455]

Valentinian I

Flavius Valentinianus

[co-Augustus February 26, 364 to 375]

Pondering on a choice of new emperor, the *consistorium* and army leaders held a conclave at Nicaea. After much deliberation over a suitable candidate they agreed on an obscure officer called Flavius Valentinianus, who was still at Ancyra with his unit, and sent a dispatch to inform him of their decision. Valentinian arrived in Nicaea on February 24, 364, which being the *bisextilis* meant that Valentinian's elevation was postponed for two days. The *bisextilis* occurred every four years, and was the equivalent of the modern leap year. Before the time of Julius Caesar the Romans had a civic year of 366 1/4 days. The pontiffs were responsible for making adjustments by adding or subtracting days from the civic year to match to the solar year, but when Caesar reformed the calendar the civic year was about three months ahead of the solar year. Caesar extended the year 46 BC to 445 days to correct this, and from 45 BC he made the civic year consist of 365 days. This required a further adjustment by adding an extra day every four years—called the *bisextilis*—as we have it today. The extra day was added between February 23 and 24, which is why the 24th and 25th days in February of a leap year were ill-omened (did they really exist?) and no business could be conducted.

For once the soldiers had not had a hand in selecting the emperor, but Valentinian reassured them that the army's welfare was his greatest priority. Further, to appease the civilian administration of the East he promised to appoint a colleague as co-Augustus. However, he appeared to be in no hurry to do so and it was a month later that he astonished everyone by nominating his even more obscure brother Valens, who assumed the title on March 28.

Valentinian seems like a strange choice for the conclave to have made. He was the uncouth and illiterate son of a Pannonian rope-maker, who refused to conceal his peasant origins and flew into uncontrollable rages when opposed. However, at forty-two he was still a commanding, even forbidding presence, not at all like his brother. Valens, seven years the younger, was pot-bellied, grotesque in

appearance, and possessed of neither courage nor ability. What the brothers had in common was a notorious brutality, and perhaps it was this quality that had been mistaken for stern discipline. One example of this cruelty of realpolitik was the fate of poor little Varronianus, Jovian's infant son. According to John Chrysostom, the later bishop of Constantinople (398–404), the child had his eyes put out “from fear of what might happen in the future, though he had done no wrong.” However, for Valentinian the appointment of Valens gave him a faithful lieutenant who acknowledged his older brother's superiority and would cause no trouble.

Valentinian was born in 321 at Cibalae (Vincovci) in southern Pannonia—five years after Constantine had defeated Licinius there—the eldest son of Gratianus, a peasant-soldier renowned not only for his rope-making but also for his strength and wrestling skills. In spite of his humble beginnings, Gratianus had a distinguished military career. He rose through the ranks first to *tribunus militum*, then to *Comes Africae* and finally *Comes Britanniae*. Suspected of having supported Magnentius, Constantius II confiscated his estates when Gratianus retired to set up his rope-making business. This did not apparently prevent his sons Valentinian or Valens entering into military careers, but Constantius's suspicions of them remained active. When Julian was acting as Caesar in the West in 357, Valentinian in command of a cavalry unit was accused of acting against the emperor's best interests, and Constantius dismissed him from service. Returned to civilian life, Valentinian married his first wife, Marina Severa, who died some time after giving birth to a son Gratianus (Gratian) in 359. He married again to a woman called Justina—of whom we shall shortly hear more—by whom he had a second son, Valentinianus (Valentinian II), and two daughters, Galla and Justa. Valens married Albia Domnica, but if there were any offspring, history does not record them. Both Valentinian and Valens were fiercely pro-Christian, with Valens preferring the teachings of the Arians.

Valentinian had been recalled to service by Jovian to assist the new emperor's father-in-law Lucillianus in visiting the various governors of the Gallic provinces. Their task was twofold: to put a gloss on the conclusion of the Persian campaign and to elicit support for Jovian's succession. For his good offices Valentinian was promoted to command of a detachment of the Scutari legion in Galatia, which is where he was when Jovian suddenly died. After Valentinian's election, the court removed to Constantinople, where Valens was elevated to

co-Augustus. The rest of the year and the winter months of 365 were spent at a villa three miles outside Naissus in a series of conferences that resulted in the division of the empire into two spheres, as had Valerian and Gallienus a hundred years earlier. Although history generally accords the official division of the empire into East and West spheres to Theodosius in 395, to all intents and purposes Valentinian's dispositions had sundered it into two separate entities. To popular surprise, Valens was given control of the Eastern dioceses and the eastern Balkans, while Valentinian took Galliae, Italy, Africa, and Illyricum. Valentinian then went to the Rhine to confront the renewed barbarian threat that had followed the departure of Julian in 361, and left his brother to meet the usurpation of Procopius (see the following section).

Valentinian had his hands full with a large-scale invasion of the Septem Provinciae by the Alamanni confederation, angered by his refusal to pay them the level of tribute to which previous emperors had accustomed them. Valentinian advanced to Durocortorum (Reims) and sent two *duces*, Charietto and Severianus, against the invaders, both of whom were defeated and died in the action. Their armies, under the new command of the *magister equitum* Dagalaifus, were equally ineffective against the widely scattered Alamanni in 366, and Valentinian replaced him with another commander called Jovinus, who managed, after several battles, to push the Germans out of Galliae.

In 367 Valentinian was distracted from a punitive expedition against the Alamanni by problems in Britain and the province of Germania II. A combined force of Picts, Attacotti, and Scots had overcome the *Dux* Fullofaudes and the British provinces were in a state of anarchy. At the same time, Frankish and Saxon forces were harrying the northern continental coast. Valentinian was unable to visit Britain because he fell ill—seriously enough to consider the matter of succession, and he elevated his eight-year-old son Gratian to be co-Augustus with him. Accordingly, Valentinian sent his *Comes Domesticorum* Severus to Britain on an investigative tour. The answer came back that only a full-scale counterattack would relieve the diocese. Accordingly, in the following year, Valentinian sent the *Comes* Theodosius to recover Britain, while Severus and Jovinus remained with the emperor to campaign against the Alamanni.

Theodosius landed in Britain in 368 with four legions, many recruited from those tribes who had remained allies of Rome,

including the Salian Franks (Batavi) and Heruli, and proceeded to Londinium. After restoring order to the south, he began a brilliant campaign of guerrilla tactics against the Caledonian invaders that pushed them back north and beyond Hadrian's Wall. There were other benefits, since he also restored the confidence and organization of the provinces' garrison, which had become demoralized by the defeat of Fullofaudes. Theodosius installed a new *vicarius* and military commander, and returned to Valentinian in 369 to be appointed *magister equitum* in place of Jovinus.

A Rigorous Administration

Meanwhile, through a combination of diplomacy and intrigue Valentinian had carried the war across the Rhine and deep into Alamanni territory. After an attack on Moguntiacum (Mainz) in early 368, the emperor connived with friendly Alamanni agents to have a chieftain called Vithicabius assassinated by his own bodyguard. In the confusion, Moguntiacum was retaken, and then the Roman army marched along the north bank of the Moenus (Main) before turning south, crossing it, and coming down the east bank of the Rhine, burning dwellings and food stores along the way. The first serious resistance was encountered at Solicinium (Schwetzingen), where a great battle was fought, in which Valentinian was almost killed. Valentinian and ten-year-old Gratian, who had accompanied his father, returned to Treveri for the winter. From 369 to the end of his reign, Valentinian began a systematic program of defensive construction. Many of the forts that Caracalla had built or refurbished in stone, were enlarged and new ones erected, from the mouth of the Rhine in the north to Lacus Venetus (Lake Constance) in the south.

The northern forts were erected in reaction to renewed Saxon attacks in 370, which were brutally suppressed through treachery. Aided by detachments under the command of Severus, the *comes* of Germania Inferior, Nannienus, fought several battles until the Saxons sued for peace. A treaty was agreed under which the Saxons exchanged a force of young warriors to serve in the legions in return for a safe passage to their homeland. But once the retiring barbarians were strung out, the Roman army fell on them and killed every one of them. Valentinian attempted further diplomacy to gain his ends against the Alamanni chieftain Macrianus, which failed in theory but worked in practice. He decided to make allies of the Burgundi, bitter enemies of their neighbors the Alamanni, and use them to attack Macrianus and, if unable to defeat his army, drive it into the waiting arms of the Romans. However, when Valentinian refused to meet the Burgundian envoys personally, his high-handedness angered them, and they returned home unwilling to support any Roman offensive. Nevertheless, the proposed alliance of their hated enemies with the Romans alarmed the Alamanni so much that they scattered, fearing an imminent attack. Theodosius was able to take advantage of their flight by crossing the Raetian *limes* and hitting the tribesmen on their flank. Many prisoners were captured, but they received a kind fate in being settled along the Po valley where, according to Ammianus, they

flourished.

The civil administration under Valentinian was generally rigorous and thorough, if not even sometimes brutal, and away from the Rhine frontier, peaceful. The one exception was Africa, where maladministration and corruption in the Tripolitanian cities hampered attempts to prevent incursions from nomadic desert tribes, and Mauretania suffered a tribal rebellion in 372. This occurred because of the corruption of *Comes* Romanus, who took sides to fill his own pockets in a dispute between the legitimate and illegitimate children of a Moorish prince and client of Rome called Nubel. In 374 Provincials led by a certain Firmus revolted against these peculations, and Valentinian sent Theodosius to restore order. Firmus was defeated, but Theodosius also pursued the evidence against Romanus and had him arrested. From this point until his untimely death in 376 (see under the section on Gratian) Theodosius governed the diocese wisely and restored its profitable contribution to the empire.

Valentinian is credited with keeping the Roman empire from crumbling away by restoring confidence in the army and the frontier defensive system. However, he did so at the expense of the civilian population and the traditional nobility, and it was the army commanders that were now the new aristocracy, the *comes* and *duces*, the counts and dukes. The army's requirements took precedence over the needs of the public, and in this subordination of the civilian population, we can see the recognizable beginnings of the medieval feudal state that the Franks would later perfect. In Valentinian's world, the role of the senatorial class—whether in Rome, Mediolanum (his capital) or Constantinople—was utterly diminished. In Rome, the once august senate was little more than another municipal council with a parochial outlook. Deprived of the glory of imperial administration, the capabilities of its members had atrophied and its ability to give good counsel dwindled. This was now a world where military men made the important decisions, and the emperor delegated his authority to an ever longer chain of bureaucrats. These officials did not always perform their duties well, further alienating the populace from the imperial government. The increasing burden of taxation to pay for the army and the bureaucracy crushed the people, and it is understandable that they resented paying for a security that they did not always receive.

Unlike his Arian brother Valens, Valentinian was an orthodox Nicene, but he wisely refused to become embroiled in the religious

controversies of the time. He even dismissed a deputation of eastern Nicene bishops who appealed to him to control Valens' Arian excesses. He was, however, more partisan when it came to heretics, particularly the Manicheans—who were banned from assemblies in Rome in 372 on the pain of death—and the Donatists in Africa. In 373 he completed the work Diocletian had given up, banned the heresy and condemned the Donatist bishops. However, some Christians received extraordinary privileges, such as a law passed in 371 that exempted from onerous municipal services any clerics who could prove they were ecclesiastics before his accession. Toward the pagans he exercised remarkable tolerance, permitting the retention of the title *Pontifex Maximus* and passing legislation that confirmed the rights of pagan divination. However, he is blamed for later appearing to rescind this with a series of trials exclusively aimed at the senatorial order, whose members were accused of using magic (which may have meant divination) and being adulterers. However, the real purpose behind these sham trials was the extraction of property for the *fiscus*, and the downgrading of the senatorial order—a process that would continue after his death.

An Apoplectic End

In 373 trouble erupted with the Quadi, a tribe that had been mostly peaceful for several generations. The problem arose from resentment at the way Roman forts were being built on what they considered their side of the Danube. A low-level amount of resistance had led to the construction program falling behind schedule, but as the man in charge, Marcellianus, increased the pressure the unrest turned to open acts of sabotage. In an attempt to restore peace King Gabinius of the Quadi arranged a meeting with the Romans, but in a fit of frustration during the negotiations, Marcellianus slew the king. Allying with their neighbors, the more warlike Sarmatae, the Quadi crossed the Danube along its north-south reaches and began ravaging the undefended Pannonian countryside of Valeria. Two legions were dispatched to counter the invaders, but were routed by Sarmatian forces. Meanwhile, further to the east, another Sarmatian army invaded Moesia, but was driven back by legions under the command of an extraordinary young man, *Dux Moesiae* Theodosius, son of Valentinian's *Magister Equitum* Theodosius, who was now governing Africa.

Valentinian only heard of this disaster in Pannonia in the later months of 374. In spring 375 he set out from Treveri and went to Carnuntum, which he found deserted. Ignoring an embassy from the Quadi that tried to present their righteous case (and disassociating themselves from the actions of the Sarmatae), Valentinian determined to punish them. His army crossed the Danube at Aquincum (Buda[pest]) and pillaged the lands of the Quadi without mercy. As winter approached, the Romans retired to Brigetio (Szöny) in Valeria, intending to continue the campaign in the spring. On 17 November another deputation of Quadi arrived in an attempt to persuade Valentinian to desist. The emperor granted the envoys an audience, but the Quadi, while being placatory, would not budge from demanding an apology for the murder of their king.

As he listened, Valentinian grew angrier and angrier. Becoming ever redder in the face, he suddenly stood up in a sudden fit, paused, and collapsed to the floor in a faint. Realizing his death was near and that Gratian was far away at Treveri and his brother Valens even farther off in Antioch, he called for his second son, Valentinian, and made him co-Augustus with Gratian; after which, at the age of fifty-four, Valentinian expired. The empire was, therefore, in the hands of three rulers, a child of four years, a boy of sixteen, and a middle-aged

sadist without any merit. And on these three the Romans depended at one of the most critical of times—they were about to face a new and more terrifying barbarian foe: the Huns.

[30. Link to: Dividing the Labor](#)

[Family Tree: House of Valentinian & Theodosian Dynasty](#)

Valens

Flavius Valens

[Co-Augustus February 28, 364 to August 9, 378]

Ammianus informs us that Valens was “dilatatory and sluggish; of a swarthy complexion; had a cast in one eye; his limbs were well set; his figure was neither tall nor short; he was knock-kneed, and rather pot-bellied.” He was also illiterate. Although there was little to recommend Valens as a ruler, the empire did benefit from his unswerving loyalty to Valentinian. Ammianus says: “He attended to his wishes as if he had been his orderly.” Thus was the empire spared the exhausting sibling wars of Constantine’s children, and the brothers were free to concentrate their energies—to a better and lesser extent—on the enemies of Rome. After the division of the empire between them, Valens returned to his capital and, after a brief sojourn, left Constantinople for Syria where, despite the treaty with Jovian, trouble was again brewing with the Sassanians. He had been gone only a few days when news from the capital reached him that Procopius, that distant cousin of Julian, who had been responsible for his burial arrangements, had rebelled.

Having attended to Julian’s funeral, Procopius had deemed it wise to disappear from the vengeful Valens’ sight, since the rumors that Julian had nominated him as his successor were flying around. He had retired to his extensive estates in Cappadocia, but when a warrant for his arrest arrived, contrived to escape across the Black Sea and hid among barbarians in the Crimea. A few months of this misery drove him back to Constantinople determined that if his life was already forfeit he should go out in a blaze of glory and seize the purple. In this scheme Procopius was aided by the wretchedness of the populace, ground under increased taxation and the peculation of Valens’ greedy ministers. More importantly to his aims, he encountered two Gallic legions, the Divitenses and Tungricani Juniores, on furlough before moving to the Danuvius. Disgruntled at being forced from their homes and in return for his lavish promises the men were eager to proclaim Procopius emperor on September 28, 365.

Although the elite of Constantinople disassociated themselves from Procopius, they neither opposed his cause nor the wishes of the ecstatic mob, which believed his claims of descent from Constantine. Along the lower Danube the Goths, who counted their long peace made with Constantine ended now that no person of his imperial bloodline sat on the throne, had begun to invade. The troops in

Bithynia and Thraciae gathering to counter the invasion offered their support to Procopius; and so did three thousand of the Goths, who were willing to serve a kinsman of Constantine—even if they frankly disbelieved his fictitious claim, it gave them an excuse to strike at the empire.

Valens was panicked by the speed with which Procopius had usurped his throne and, stuck in Anatolia without the immediate support of his legions, appealed to Valentinian for help. But, as we have seen, Valentinian was preoccupied in the West and sent back a characteristically curt reply: “Procopius is only enemy to ourselves, the Alamanni are the foes of the whole Roman world.” It was only the persuasion of some tough officers that prevented Valens from abdicating on the spot when he realized he was on his own. But he was not. Under the command of his Syrian Lupicinus, his *magister equitum*, the eastern legions rallied, and marched into Galatia ready for battle. Ammianus makes no direct link between this Lupicinus and the man Julian sent to recover Britanniae from the Picts and Scots in 360, but there is every reason to suppose they are the same. Ammianus describes him as being:

...a stout and experienced soldier, who was apt, however, to set up his horn on high and to talk in the style of a tragic hero. It was long a matter of debate whether his greed predominated over his cruelty or the reverse.

And this perfectly characterizes the actions of Lupicinus in handling the imminent Gothic migration.

The loyalty of Valentinian’s Illyrian legions ensured that the war between his brother and Procopius was quarantined in Anatolia, and during the autumn and winter of 365–66 the latter was the more successful. His forces captured Cyzicus and successfully defended against a siege of Nicaea. But he was holding onto the purple by means of sham embassies from Egypt, Africa, and even Persia that purported to support his cause, and by demoralizing Valens’ troops with fake messages of Valentinian’s death. The falsehood of the latter soon became manifest, and the failure of the corn supply from Egypt put paid to the lie of the embassies. The populace began to lose faith when Procopius collected two year’s taxes in a single month, and any weak senatorial support faded as he seized their estates to raise finance.

Valens appealed to veteran officers among the mutineers who knew in their hearts that Procopius was an imposter, no kinsman of Constantine. And then in the spring of 366, he marched his main force

from Pisidia to the plains of Thyatira in Lydia, where the two armies met, and he defeated Procopius's general Gomoarius. A second battle soon followed where Valens met Procopius himself at Nacolea. Initial successes for Procopius turned sour when many of his troops—lacking their promised rewards and encouraged by the cries of their opponents that they were fighting for a foul usurper—turned their weapons and joined Lupicinus and Valens. Procopius fled the field with two officers, Barchalba and Florentius, to hide in the surrounding hills. But despairing of their fate, his companions bound him during the night and took him at daybreak to Valens' camp. His head was at once severed from his neck, packed up and sent to Valentinian as proof of the usurper's death. And for their treachery, Barchalba and Florentius were also put to the sword.

The Gothic War

The Visigoths—or Tervingi branch of the Goths—who had offered their services to Procopius, now posed a problem. They had arrived too late to help the usurper, but they were still unwilling to return home empty-handed; Valens had them bound into captivity and dispersed among the cities south of the Danube. This aroused the ire of Athanaric, chief *iudex* (judge) of the Tervingi, who wanted to know why some of his people, who had entered Roman territory at the wish of the emperor Procopius, were being detained. Valens' intemperate response was to dispatch an army in the spring of 367 under the joint commands of Victor and Arintheus, the *magistri equitum* and *peditum* respectively of Thraciae. In the face of this force, the Visigoths fled into the fastness of the Carpathians, and apart from a few skirmishes and some pillaging, little was accomplished. In the following year adverse weather caused the Danube to flood, which hampered the campaign; instead the emperor spent the time reconstructing the ruined fortifications of Trajan and Hadrian. In 369, the Romans moved further east to cross from Noviodunum in the most northerly corner of the province of Scythia. This campaign was so successful that the Romans fought their way right through Athanaric's Tervingi and into the lands of their kinsmen, the Greuthungi, or Ostrogoths, defeating them as well.

Athanaric sued for peace terms and a treaty was arranged that was ruinous for the Visigoths, a semi-civilized nation emerging from barbarism which relied greatly on cross-border trade with the empire. The customary tribute was withheld, and only two market-towns along the entire length of the Danube were allowed to carry on mercantile operations. Since he was a stern man of old Gothic tradition, Athanaric would not set foot on Roman soil, and since it was beneath the dignity of the emperor to cross the river to meet the loser, a compromise was reached; the two leaders signed the treaty on a raft moored in the middle of the Danube. If the terms of the treaty were unfavorable to the Tervingi, so, it would turn out, were they unfortunate for Rome.

For Valens the apparently satisfactory outcome of the Gothic war was well timed, because his presence was now needed again in Anatolia. Under the terms of Jovian's treaty of 363 with Persia, Rome had rescinded control over Armenia, and Shapur had grasped the opportunity of Procopius's usurpation to extend Sassanian power in the region. After bribing the Armenian lords to defect from their king,

Arsaces (Arshak), Shapur had him arrested and flung into the grimly named Prison of Oblivion. In 367 Shapur invaded Armenian Iberia and besieged Pap, the young son of Arsaces, in his fortress of Artogerassa. In the following spring Pap escaped and fled to Valens, who was at Marcianopolis in Thraciae campaigning against the Goths. As soon as the treaty with Anatharic was signed, Valens sent Arintheus with Pap to install him on the Armenian throne, which transgression led Shapur to lay waste whole regions of Armenia.

A larger Roman force counterattacked in 370, and in 371 Valens' *magistri* defeated Shapur's army. The result was a truce, probably necessary in Shapur's case because he was obliged to deal with a Kushan invasion on his eastern frontier. However, Armenia remained a problem for Valens when the boy-king Pap demanded control over several cities in Mesopotamia and Osrhoene, including Edessa. Fearing Pap's defection to Persia if he was denied, Valens sent an expedition against him, and he was captured and executed. In his place another Arsacid, Varazdat, was placed on the puppet throne. Shapur argued that this was transgressing the treaty of 363, and war again loomed.

The Second Gothic War

The year 375 was to be ill-omened for the Roman empire. Even as Valentinian died as a result of his uncontrolled temper, a new terror was rising up from the vastness of the central Asian steppe to fall without mercy on the Gothic nations. The vast horde of Huns, originating in Mongolia and impelled westward by some unknown force, had subjugated the Scythian tribes of Alans, dwelling between the Don and Rha (Volga) rivers, before encountering the Ostrogoths in the year mentioned above. With terrifying speed, the pony-mounted Huns swept around and down on the Visigoths, who withdrew in panic to the very edges of the Danube and sent embassies to Valens pleading for asylum within Roman borders. According to contemporary historian Eunapius, the sight along the river bank was an extraordinary one:

The multitude of [Goths] escaping from the murderous savagery of the Huns...amounted to not less than two hundred thousand men of fighting age. These...stretched out their hands from afar with loud lamentations, and earnestly supplicated that they might be allowed to cross over the river...and promising that they would faithfully adhere to the imperial alliance if this boon were granted them.

The figure mentioned here referred only to the warriors, and the request was, therefore, being made on behalf of a host probably numbering double that.

Preparing his Persian war in Antioch, Valens was thus faced with a dilemma. A refusal would undoubtedly lead to a Gothic invasion, forcing him to fight on two fronts. A transfer of troops in 374 to his brother's army in Pannonia had weakened Valens' mobile forces, and he needed an aggressive and costly recruitment campaign to replenish it. His advisers—among them Lupicinus—were quick to point out the advantages to be gained in granting the Visigoths their request. Not only would they strengthen the Roman army, in doing so they would also relieve local landowners of a duty to provide manpower (they could pay a tithe in much-needed gold instead), and the Visigoths would provide a bulwark on the borders against the Huns.

Several groupings of Goths were seeking asylum, but when he made up his mind, Valens dealt with only one, that under the leadership of two chieftains named Fritigern and Alavivus. Valens already knew Fritigern from when he had supported him in a struggle against Athanaric that had stemmed from Athanaric's persecution of Gothic Christians. The clinching point of the deal was Fritigern's

promise to promote the cause of Arianism over orthodox Christianity, and Valens granted admission to his group. This did not, however, prevent other Goths from slipping across the Danube in the confusion that followed.

Because of the pressing matters in the East, Valens left the supervision of the crossing and resettlement in the hands of Lupicinus, now *Comes Thraciae* and Maximus, *Dux Moesiae* (and probably the later usurper of Gratian's throne). The emperor's conditions stated that the Goths were to deliver up their weapons to Roman officials on their arrival on the river's southern shore. In return they were to be fed before their wide dispersal to allotted farmlands and the eventual enrolment of the men in the army. Alas, Lupicinus cared little for efficiency—his principal aim was to make a fast profit out of the crisis. He and Maximus also seriously underestimated the numbers of refugees and the operation's logistics. With insufficient forces available, they were unable to prevent another crossing lower down the Danube of equally terrified Ostrogoths and surviving Alans. Instead of an orderly dispersal, Lupicinus kept the refugees in appalling conditions close to the Danube. Their valuables were taken as payment for inadequate supplies of food and, as hunger increased, so the exploitation worsened. Ammianus, again a witness, writes:

Slaves, money and furniture all being exhausted, they began—even the nobles—to sell their own children. Deep must have been the misery endured by those free German hearts before they yielded to the cruel logic of the situation.

However, in Thraciae Lupicinus proved as incompetent as he was corrupt. Having failed to disarm the Visigothic warriors, his forces were almost annihilated by the rioting barbarians outside Marcianopolis in 377. The Tervingi joined up with the Greuthungi, and the combined Gothic nation then rampaged through Thraciae and Moesiae; after which, we hear nothing more of Lupicinus. For Valens, it was the worst possible outcome. He was forced to abandon Antioch, leaving behind but a skeleton force—ironically containing many Goths whose fathers had remained in Anatolia in Roman service after earlier incursions—and return to Constantinople on May 30, 378. It was during a brief pause in the capital that he received news that should have been pleasing to the fifty-year-old emperor: his nephew Gratian had secured a string of great victories against barbarian enemies in the West. However, this only conceived in his heart an envy for Gratian and a determination to win a victory in which his brilliant

nephew should have no hand. Valens set out for Hadrianopolis, near where the barbarian host had gathered. While encamped close by the city Valens received a letter from the hand of Gratian's *Comes Domesticorum*, Richomeres, to inform him that his victorious co-Augustus—still only nineteen—was on the way with his army.

Valens was torn between the common-sense advice of both *Magister Equitum* Victor and Richomeres to wait the few days necessary to make conjunction with Gratian and his own bitter jealousy of his nephew, which predicated an immediate attack. Two other factors pressed him into rash action. Sebastianus, the *magister peditum*, who had served under Julian in Mesopotamia, fresh from a minor victory over an isolated band of Goths, was enthusiastic for instant battle. And then there were the reports of his scouts, who erroneously put the enemy numbers at ten thousand. On August 9, 378 a last-minute attempt was made to negotiate with the Goths, but the talks broke down when an over-eager Roman unit sallied forth and carried both sides into battle. For Valens, it was a disaster. His scouts had grossly underestimated the forces of the enemy, and the Visigoths fell on the legions in fury. According to Ammianus:

In the great tumult the infantry, exhausted by the efforts and the perils of the fighting, no longer able to think or plan, their spears broken, rushed recklessly with drawn swords into the dense masses of the enemy, careless of their lives now that all escape was impossible.

The Romans held their own early on but were crushed by the surprise arrival of Greuthungi cavalry, which split their ranks. Valens was either killed by an arrow or, according to a different version, wounded in the battle but escaped to a nearby farmstead only to be burned to death by Gothic marauders. Two-thirds of the Eastern army perished at Hadrianopolis, in what Ammianus called “the most destructive defeat since the battle of Cannae,” and the ecclesiastical writer Tyrannus Rufinus (c.340–410) “the beginning of evils for the Roman empire then and thereafter.”

Gratian

Flavius Gratianus

[Co-Augustus 367 to August 25, 383]

Gratian was born on April 18, 359 at Sirmium, the eldest son of Valentinian I and his first wife, Marina Severa. In 367, he was with his father on campaign against the Alamanni, when Valentinian was stricken with an illness. Fearing that the emperor was dying, the court immediately scrambled to find his successor. The *Magister Memoriae* Rusticus Julianus was popular with the ministers, while the army supported the *Magister Equitum* Severus. However, Valentinian recovered and designated Gratian as his successor by proclaiming him co-Augustus in an attempt to forestall any further friction between the imperial court and his senior officers. The general concern over Gratian's elevation is understandable. Not only was he just eight but he showed little interest in military matters, being a studious boy. According to Ammianus, Valentinian assuaged the officers' fears by telling them that Gratian's ability to rule would be based on his sense of justice and the nobility of his character, and that the boy would in time grow to be a military commander.

In pursuing his son's military education, Valentinian took him on the campaign of 368, but after it became clear that Gratian was not up to the rigors of military life, the emperor kept him behind the front lines. The leading rhetorician of the time, Ausonius, was appointed to be the young prince's tutor, and he proudly described his student as possessing a golden mind. By all accounts, he was a passable poet, but also enjoyed athletics, at which he excelled, and his skill at hunting Ausonius called "almost supernatural." At the age of fifteen he was married to Constantia, daughter of the late emperor Constantius II. (Constantia narrowly escaped capture by the Quadi in Pannonia while on her way to the wedding.) After her death in 383 he married Laeta, about whom nothing else is known.

Gratian was resident at Treveri in Gaul when Valentinian died at Brigetio in November 375, and heard that his half-brother, Valentinian II, had also been nominated as co-Augustus. One version of the account suggests that it was the *magister peditum* in Pannonia who arranged to have Valentinian II proclaimed emperor, in order to quell a threatened rebellion by the army, which wanted to install its own candidate. However, it may have been that the emperor, fearing that sixteen-year-old Gratian was still no warrior, would not be acceptable to the soldiers, whereas the infant Valentinian II could be

vested with the imperial title, which would allow his mother Justina and the generals who supported her a continued free hand in the infant's name. Gratian, upset that he was not consulted, nevertheless acquiesced to the army's demands and accepted Valentinian II's elevation in a graceful manner. Thus Gratian controlled Galliae, Britanniae, and Hispaniae, while the regents of Valentinian II ordered the affairs of Illyricum, Africa, and Italy.

When his uncle Valens requested his help against the Goths who had revolted in Thraciae after their crossing of the Danuvius in 376, Gratian ordered the dispatch of some Pannonian legions under the command of *dux* Frigeridus, and several Gallic legions under his *comes domesticorum* Richomeres. However, the most senior of his generals, a Frankish noble called Merobaudes who had taken service under the empire and risen to high rank, disobeyed by leaving a greater strength of troops along the Rhine frontier to guard against a possible Alamanni attack. Merobaudes' defiance of the emperor's orders suggests that his officers did not hold Gratian in high esteem. As the situation in Thraciae deteriorated, it became clear that Gratian himself would have to take to the field, and was preparing to do so when the Alamanni invaded across the Rhine at the beginning of 378. He now had reason to thank Merobaudes for his foresight, for with a small mobile force, the garrisons along the river were sufficient to mount a campaign against the barbarians and defeat them. Gratian then turned on the southernmost tribe of the Alamanni nation, the Lentienses, and won a great victory in Argentaria in February, killing some thirty thousand of the enemy. Argentaria was the district surrounding Argentorate (Strasbourg); the battle took place near the modern site of Colmar, about 30 miles south of Strasbourg. With the western provinces temporarily secured, he set out for the East again, but before he could arrive, Valens made the fateful decision to attack the massed Goths at Hadrianopolis on August 9, 378.

With the empire of the East in chaos, Gratian wisely decided that his limited military skills were insufficient to the task of restoring order against so large a host. Besides, he was uncertain that his recent victories had restored the frontier's security. He recalled the superb skills of his father's *Dux Moesiae*, Theodosius, who had distinguished himself in 373 in the campaign against the Sarmatae. Although he was only about thirty-two, Theodosius had retired to the family estates in Hispania Gallaecia (Galicia) after his father—*Magister* Theodosius, who had done so well for Valentinian in Britain and Africa—had fallen

foul of palace intrigues and been executed two years earlier.

A strange story attaches to the possible reason for the execution at Carthage of the elder Theodosius after a long, loyal, and glorious career. This event happened in 367, a few months after Valentinian I's death at Brigetio, and is oddly unaccounted for by Ammianus. Some years before Valentinian's demise, Valens came to hear that certain aristocrats in Antioch had consulted a spiritualist in an attempt to discover the name of the cruel Eastern emperor's successor. The seer established the answer by suspending a ring on a cord above a disk marked with the letters of the Greek alphabet and shaking it up and down. As the ring bounced around the perimeter of the disk it spelled out words. The answer given was ΘΕΟΔ (THEO). The questioners immediately assumed a high-born and accomplished young Antiochene called Theodorus would be the next Augustus in Constantinople. Valens promptly had the unfortunate Theodorus executed along with many of his philosopher (and therefore presumably pagan) friends. Doubtless, four years later, the fame of the elder Theodosius reminded jealous Valens that the four fatal letters spelled Theodosius every bit as well as Theodorus. His counsels, therefore, to Justina—as avowed an Arian as her brother-in-law—to have the orthodox elder Theodosius executed may well have been influential. When Gratian's call to duty arrived, the younger Theodosius welcomed it, and on January 19, 379, Gratian raised him to be his co-Augustus.

Gratian's Religious Persecutions

In 381 Gratian moved his court from Treveri to Mediolanum and, unusually for the time, visited Rome. He had proved himself an inspiring leader in the field, but now in his early twenties, he was growing lazy. According to Ammianus, like Commodus, he was more concerned with participating in displays of personal prowess in the arena than with supervising military affairs. And life in the cities provided him with a greater opportunity to indulge in the predilection he felt for the more handsome of his tall blond Alan bodyguards. However, he reconciled this un-Christian affection with a great piety, and his adherence to the orthodox creed led to conflict with provincial bishops, and between himself and the still-pagan senatorial aristocracy. When the case of Priscillian, a Hispanic noble who was preaching a new ascetic form of Christianity in the south of Galliae, reached Gratian, the emperor intervened. Priscillian had gained many followers, including several provincial bishops. Some of the clergy, including the influential Hyginus, bishop of Corduba, wanted the new sect branded as heretic and its followers condemned, and Gratian agreed with them. Priscillian was saved—at least for a while—by the intrigue of his bishop-followers, who bribed the local governor to rescind the imperial order for his arrest; and it would not be Gratian who would settle Priscillian's place in the Church.

The emperor's orthodoxy was felt with a particularly heavy hand in Rome when, in 382, at the instigation of Ambrosius (Ambrose), the formidable bishop of Mediolanum, Gratian had the altar and statue of Nike (Victory), that Julian had restored to the senate house, swept away. He expropriated the wealth of the temple of Vesta and its Vestal Virgins for the *fiscus*, and withdrew the state subsidies that funded many pagan activities. When the senate protested, Gratian rejected the title of *Pontifex Maximus* and the ceremonial robes that went with that ancient and most Roman of offices. It was, therefore, with no great regret that the Roman senate would hear of his death shortly after.

Early in 383 Gratian went north to counter another incursion of the Alamanni. This coincided with news of the proclamation by his troops of the *comes Britannicae* Magnus Clemens Maximus as Augustus, and in fact the barbarian incursion and the proclamation may have been connected. In any event, a few days later Maximus landed in Galliae and confronted Gratian near Lutetia Parisiorum. Gratian may have won the day, but his preferment of barbarians in his household and guard had destroyed the soldier's affection for their young emperor,

and when his Moorish cavalry unexpectedly defected, most of his troops followed suit. Gratian fled toward the Alps, but was caught at Lugdunum by Maximus's *magister equitum*, Andragathius, who killed him on August 25, 383.

The events of Gratian's reign highlight the continuing trend of assimilating barbarians and making many of them—notably the Frank Merobaudes—a part of the imperial court. Indeed, before many more years have passed, there will be no recognizable Roman in a position of power, not even an Italian. This approaches the time in Roman history when it might be compared to the old adage about the lunatics taking over the asylum. His elevation and his death show that once again it was the power of the army that made and broke emperors, and with few exceptions this would remain the case until the fall of the Western empire. Ammianus wryly observed that despite his “golden mind,” Gratian's talents lay in the opposite direction from what the empire needed. However, he had conferred on the empire one lasting benefit—the elevation of Theodosius to supreme power.

Magnus Maximus

Magnus Clemens Maximus

[*Usurper spring 383 to August 28, 388*]

Magnus Maximus was a fellow Galician of the elder Theodosius and may even have been a distant relative, but if not, certainly one of his clients. It is thought that he served under Theodosius during the campaign of 367–69 in Britain as a junior officer with either the Heruli or Batavian legions, and again in Raetia against the Alamanni chieftain Macrianus in 370–72. History is quite clear that he went to Africa in 373, when Theodosius was sent by Valentinian I to suppress the Moorish rebellion of Firmus. A part of his task was to work with Gildo, one of Firmus's brothers who had remained loyal to Rome, and arrest the *vicarius* Vincentius, who was suspected of being an accomplice of the peculating *comes* Romanus. The relationship with Gildo almost certainly has a bearing on the treacherous behavior of Gratian's Moorish cavalry at the battle outside Lutetia. In about 375, Maximus may have been promoted to the position of *dux Moesiae*, and in the following year have been the grasping assistant to Lupicinus in the resettlement of the Goths in Thraciae; but this could also have been an entirely different Maximus.

Certainty returns in 380, when Maximus became *comes Britannicae*, and in the following year led the British legions to victory over invading Picts and Scots. The reasons for his rebellion against Gratian are not made clear, but several possibilities, or a combination of them, exist. The most fanciful is to be found in the Welsh *Mabinogion*, which contains a story called *The Dream of Macsen Wedig (Maximus Imperator)*. In this Welsh legend, Maximus is married to Elen, the only daughter of the aging high-king of the Celts called Eudaf Hen, to rule over the British kingdom after the king's death. The old king's disgruntled nephew, enraged at his displacement, goes to Caledonia to raise an army of Picts and Scots to overthrow the Roman usurper. In the course of battle, despite a defeat at the hands of Maximus, the two rivals become close friends. Now king of Celtic Britannia, Maximus is incensed to hear of his relative Theodosius's elevation by Gratian, and sets out to take control of the Western empire. A more prosaic reason may be found in the last sentence: Maximus had undoubtedly hoped that his relationship with Theodosius the father would lead to a promotion as the son's colleague. But Theodosius named his infant son Arcadius as his successor in January 383, thus shattering any hopes that Maximus may have had of sharing the imperial power legally.

Finally, it is worth noting that the British troops were thoroughly fed up with Gratian and his hated guard of Alans, and all too willing to make Maximus their choice for the purple.

Maximus himself, however, was only too happy to employ barbarians, such as Andragathius, his Gothic *magister equitum*. The Alamanni invasion of Galliae prior to Maximus's crossing may have been engineered on his behalf by a chieftain named Fraomar to divert Gratian. Fraomar had been sent to Britain by Valentinian I to strengthen the defenses there after 369, and Maximus had forged a friendship with the Alaman. Following Gratian's defeat, Maximus established his court at Treveri and sent ambassadors to Theodosius and Valentinian II. Theodosius received the news of Gratian's death with horror, but he was powerless to do anything because political upheavals in Persia were occupying his attention and Huns were beginning to worry at the Danubian frontier. With reluctance, Theodosius accepted the situation—Maximus was in control of the western provinces, and it would have to stay that way until he was in a position to change it.

He did, however, reach an accord with him: that he would leave the pretender alone as long as Maximus recognized Valentinian II's sovereignty over Italy and Illyricum. This accord of 383–84 was helped by the embassy to Treveri of Ambrose (374–97), the bishop of Mediolanum. As a fellow Nicene Christian Ambrose pleaded with Maximus to leave the young Valentinian—of Arian persuasion—alone. He also purchased time for Valentinian's Frankish *magister militum*, *comes* Bauto, to fortify the Alpine passes against Maximus. However, almost immediately after Ambrose had departed, Maximus named his infant son Flavius Victor as co-Augustus and refused to recognize the rights of Valentinian II.

His illegitimate claim to the imperial powers did not make Maximus a poor ruler. While he would not allow any transgressions from the Alamanni, his friendly relations with several of their number eased the pressures on the frontier, and the Gallic economy prospered. He struck good coinage, and issued new legislation to ease some of the previous tax burden on the populace and the provincial nobility. He reorganized the diocese by making new sub-divisions, creating Lugdunensis III and Lugdunensis Senonia, while Gildo governed those African provinces not under Valentinian's control. In religious matters, his adherence to a strictly Nicene creed brought about Priscillian's demise. Priscillian had resumed his see of Avila after the rescinding of

Gratian's order, but was now brought before a council at Burdigala (Bordeaux) and condemned as a heretic. He appealed to Maximus at Treveri, but his enemy, the orthodox bishop Hydatius, accused Priscillian's followers of sorcery. On this pretext, Maximus's praetorian prefect, Evodius, had several seized and tortured to extract confessions. On the basis of these, Priscillian was executed. Heresy was also to be the excuse for invading Italy, to save the empire from the Arianism of young Valentinian and Justina, his domineering mother.

In 387 Maximus crossed the Alps in force. Valentinian and Justina fled to Aquileia and then to Thessalonica, where Theodosius met them and took the imperial fugitives under his protection. The emperor of the East began preparations for a war against Maximus, and in his careful way he did not hurry them. This was not to be a campaign to drive the pretender from Italy, it was to be a war of eradication. So it was only in June 388 that he was ready and marched with great rapidity into Illyricum, meeting Maximus's army under the command of Andragathius in battle at Siscia (Sisak) on the Savus, and put the rebels to flight. Two more skirmishes at Emona (Ljubljana), against Maximus's brother Marcellinus, and Poetovio (Ptuj) followed until Maximus was captured at Aquileia and brought before Theodosius. Maximus argued that he thought he had Theodosius's approval when he stole the throne from Gratian, and for a moment it looked as though the emperor would spare him. Knowing Theodosius's reputation for clemency, his soldiers took no chances and whisked Maximus away to execute him instantly. His infant son Flavius Victor was captured by Arbogastes (Arbogast), the *magister equitum*, and also put to death.

Maximus was just another usurper in Rome's long history, but his five-year reign marks a turning point. His cause, if misguided, was an earnest one; he intended to provide good government. Maximus was also the first of a series of what we might call the "modern" Roman generals of the West to hold power, and he could have claimed the legitimacy of his usurpation through that most medieval of beliefs—that might is right. His religious policies began the long battle between Church and State, as to whether a secular ruler had the right of control over episcopal matters. And as for the common soldier's hatred of Gratian's policy of preferring barbarians over Romans, Maximus went even further in promoting non-Romans to high office, surely a recognition that hardly any of the soldiers were actually

Romans any longer. Finally, Maximus was the last really powerful emperor of the West, and his defeat made Constantinople the de facto center of the Roman empire.

Valentinian II

Flavius Valentinianus

[Co-Augustus November 22, 375 to May 15, 392]

The reign of Valentinian II was unremarkable other than it emphasized the subordination of the Roman West to that of the Roman East. He was only four when he became co-Augustus with his half-brother Gratian and his uncle Valens, and for the greater part of his reign he was a minor under the thumb of his ministers and his mother Justina. And even when he achieved his majority he was expressly the junior partner to Theodosius. Valentinian II was a victim of fourth-century Roman politics, in short, the puppet of formidable people who exercised his government in his name.

Valentinian II was born in 371, the second son of Valentinian I by the emperor's second wife, the Sicilian Justina. The historian Zosimus claims that Justina had been married previously to the usurper Magnentius, Constans' murderer. This is certainly colorful, but he offers no proof of such an unlikely match. When Valentinian I died at Brigetio in November 375, the younger Valentinian was proclaimed on November 22 at Sirmium. Shortly after, the imperial family moved to Italy and Valentinian II's court was established at Mediolanum. Justina had prudently concealed her adherence to the Arian creed from her orthodox husband, but now—abetted by a powerful Gothic (and therefore Arian) faction at court—revealed her faith and determined to rear her infant son in the heresy. This brought her into direct conflict with the redoubtable bishop of Mediolanum, Ambrose, who had extinguished the last embers of Arianism in his diocese and was determined to “save” the young emperor.

In fact, the first clash happened while Justina and Valentinian were still at Sirmium, where Justina championed the election of an Arian bishop to the see, but was defeated by the efforts and persuasive oratory of Ambrose. At the Council of Aquileia in 381, over which he presided, Ambrose secured the ejection of the two remaining Arian prelates in the West, the Illyrians Secundianus and Palladius. In the following years the struggle intensified, and Ambrose was frequently in danger of his life. Yet, despite a level of popularity among the people that bordered on devotion and would have made it possible for the bishop to depose Justina with one word, he never spoke it. Eventually, Justina abandoned her campaign against Ambrose, and indeed had to call on him to save the imperiled throne from Maximus in 383–84.

Although he would be unable to wean the young Valentinian from the Arian heresy until after Justina's death, Ambrose was successful in enacting legislation in the emperor's name that benefited Christianity in general. In 384 the Roman senate made an attempt to restore the altar of Nike (Victory) to the senate house and the pagan rites connected with it. Ambrose carried the day, and the senators' petition was rejected, and would be again by Theodosius in 389. The course of this history has not finished with Ambrose, who famously later clashed with Theodosius. Both Theodosius and Maximus used Valentinian's Arianism against him. Theodosius is supposed to have said in a letter that he deserved Maximus's enmity because he had deserted the true faith. Maximus argued that his claim to the purple was more legitimate than Valentinian's because the latter had deserted the true faith of his father.

When Justina and Valentinian were forced to flee to Thessalonica in 387, Theodosius was at first reluctant to take up arms against Maximus. According to Zosimus he was only persuaded to do so after Justina sent to him her daughter Galla to plead their cause because she knew that Theodosius was susceptible to the charms of attractive women. His wife, the Augusta Aelia Flavia Flacilla, had died recently, and apparently Theodosius became besotted with Galla and married her. After the defeat of Maximus, Theodosius stayed in Mediolanum for three years. At the beginning of this period Justina died, and Theodosius and Ambrose were finally able to disengage Valentinian from his heretical Arianism to the Nicene creed, albeit only as a catechumen.

Valentinian was not allowed to enter into the administration, however, and Theodosius undertook all governmental matters, and appointed Valentinian's ministers and military officers. The most important of these was Arbogast, the *magister militum*, who Theodosius promoted to the rank of *comes Galliae* and charged with the protection of the western provinces in place of the recently deceased *comes* Bauto. Before leaving for Constantinople on June 16, 391, Theodosius obliged Valentinian to accompany Arbogast to Gaul, and the unwilling junior Augustus removed his court from Mediolanum to Vienna (Vienne), all too aware that the real ruler of the West was the *comes Galliae*. Arbogast was a Frank, who had served with Gratian in the Pannonian campaign of 380 and under Theodosius against Maximus. He could count among his relatives *comes* Bauto, possibly his father, and his uncle *comes* Richomeres. There is little doubt that he was

widely regarded as one of the finest soldiers of his time, and adored by his men for his “flame-like” qualities of leadership and all-conquering energy. They especially saw in this gruff Frank an incorruptibility uncommon in officers of Roman extraction because he cared nothing for gold or the finer trappings of life. It goes without saying that Arbogast and Valentinian had nothing in common beyond a sneering contempt for the latter by the former and a resentful dread of too-powerful Arbogast by the young emperor.

Arbogast never shrank from laying hands on Valentinian’s counselors if he suspected them of any corruption—and several must have given him reason—and one intimate, a certain Harmonius, he ran through with his sword in front of the terrified emperor. Valentinian frequently complained about this state of affairs to Theodosius, but his protestations fell on deaf ears. Matters came to a head when, determined to exert his *imperium*, Valentinian issued a written order to Arbogast demanding his immediate resignation from all his offices. Arbogast stared at the note for a few moments, and then slowly ripped it into pieces before walking away. A few days later, on May 15, 392, Valentinian, now barely twenty-one, was found dead in his apartments. The official verdict was suicide, for which the only possible motive was despair that if he did not take his own life, someone else soon would. Since a suicide’s soul was supposed to reside in purgatory, perhaps Ambrose’s assurances to Valentinian’s grieving sisters that he had been carried up to heaven indicated that the bishop suspected foul play. If so, once again he said nothing.

[31. Link to: The Rise of Theodosius](#)

[Family Tree: House of Valentinian & Theodosian Dynasty](#)

[*Usurper August 2, 392 to September 6, 394*]

The reign of Eugenius was wholly the creation of Arbogast the “king-maker.” Although he was virtual ruler of the West, and the death of Valentinian had no effect on the army’s affection for him and the civil functionaries obeyed his every word, Arbogast could not assume the purple. He was no fool and knew that, being a barbarian, it was unwise to assume the semblance as well as the substance of imperial power. Historical records still kept fresh the reign of Maximinus Thrax, the murderer of young Severus Alexander a century and a half before, since which time no full-blooded barbarian had been hailed by the troops. Perhaps more to the point, Arbogast was not even an Arian, he was a pagan.

His choice fell on Eugenius, a middle-aged professor of rhetoric who had formerly served as head of the *fiscus*, and whom *Comes* Richomeres had recommended to Arbogast as a clever and obedient subordinate. For his part, Eugenius was not anxious to receive this dangerous honor, but on reflection he realized that he had no alternative but to accept. His reception by the troops was a foregone conclusion—he was the nomination of their magnificent commander. According to the poet Claudian, this translation in his fortunes “made the barbarian’s lackey lord of all.”

Well and good, but what was Theodosius to make of all this? When the embassy from the West arrived in Constantinople to inform the emperor of Valentinian’s death and the elevation of Eugenius Theodosius was furious—it was his right alone to designate a fellow-Augustus. Nevertheless, none was better acquainted with Arbogast’s military skills, so Theodosius returned a diplomatic reply and began preparing for a difficult war. All through 393 those preparations continued, while Arbogast extended his power into Italy. His antagonist was Ambrose, who was vehemently opposed to Arbogast’s protégé acclaimed in a Gallic province.

However, Arbogast’s very paganism now came to his aid. The ancient cities of Italy were the last refuges of heathen worship in the empire, and while Eugenius was a Christian, he was also a rhetorician and willing to extend tolerance to the gods whose classical names, as a matter of tradition, featured in many of his orations. The aristocrats of the Italian cities, especially those in Rome, were happy to acclaim one who might allow them a greater freedom of worship than they had enjoyed for decades, and the petitions were immediate. By the middle

of 393 the temples of Rome were reopened, the smoke of sacrifices clouded the air, and conservatives were once again celebrating the ancient Roman festivals of Lupercalia and Saturnalia. The altar of Nike was restored to the curia, and Eugenius went so far as to grant petitioners revenues to bestow on many temples.

Reports of the pagan revival in Gaul and Italy soon reached the ears of Theodosius. In November 293 he issued an edict against idolatry and made the practice of augury over steaming entrails an act of treason against the emperor. As Eugenius approached Mediolanum, Ambrose withdrew to a self-imposed exile in Bononia (Bologna), from where he continued to excoriate the horrors being perpetrated in his see. He wrote to Eugenius exhorting him to return to his Christian ways, and telling him that no matter how mighty he, the emperor, might think himself, God could see into his heart. There can be little doubt that whatever he thought privately, Eugenius would not go against the wishes of Arbogast.

As he led the army out of Mediolanum in 394 to meet Theodosius, Arbogast threw back the taunt that on their victorious return he would stable the cavalry's horses in the basilica and press-gang clerics into the army. Thus it was in late spring 394, that when Theodosius marched again for the West, he knew he was not only facing a usurper but also fighting for the faith. The two great armies met on September 5 slightly to the north of Tergeste (Trieste), on a small tributary of the Isonzo called the Frigidus (Vipava). To the east, the host of Theodosius advanced under the holy *labarum* of the Christian emperor; to the west the army of Eugenius and Arbogast stood under banners bearing the symbol of Sol Invictus. The following battle lasted for two days, and losses on both sides were horrendous. But on the second day a hurricane wind blew in from the east, benefiting Theodosius. The pagan army could barely see in front of them for the dust blasting into their faces. Later, Christian historians naturally attributed this good fortune to the blessing of God. The western army soon capitulated and Eugenius was beheaded at the emperor's feet. Arbogast escaped into the hills, but after a few days' wandering decided not to test the famous Theodosian clemency again, and took his own life. Once more the empire was united under one ruler. In Rome the temples were hurriedly closed up and the idols were packed away, nevermore to be seen.

Theodosius I the Great

Flavius Theodosius

[Co-Augustus January 19, 379 to January 17, 395]

The reign of Theodosius has already interwoven its way into many of the previous pages, but the repetition of some events provides an opportunity to present them in a different light. The story of the Roman empire's last great ruler of West and East begins in approximately 346 when Theodosius was born at Cauca (Coca), a small town in the northwest of Carthaginensis, adjacent to the provincial borders of Gallaecia, Lusitania, and Tarraconensis, on a tributary of the upper Durus (Douro), some thirty miles from modern Segovia. He was of illustrious birth because his father, the elder Theodosius, and mother Thermantia, were both from powerful provincial families, the real aristocracy of the mid-fourth-century Roman empire. His father's glorious military career has been outlined in an earlier section, and according to the laws of Diocletian and Constantine the son was forced to follow his father into the army at an early age. We are told that he was affable but with a noble, commanding presence, and a man of slender education—not surprising in one who spent all his youth in the military.

Campaigning with his father in Britain, Africa, and Illyricum, he had plenty of time to learn the military arts from an expert, and his own abilities propelled him rapidly up the ranks until by 373 he was *Dux Moesiae*, when he was about twenty-seven. On the execution of his father in 376, he retired to the family estates. At some point, probably during this period, Theodosius married Aelia Flavia Flacilla, who was of a noble Galician family. She was to give him three children, two sons, Arcadius and Honorius, and a daughter, Pulcheria. Arcadius was born either in 377 or 378, on the brink of his father's recall to duty, Honorius on September 9, 384, and Pulcheria, who died in childhood, in 385. The Christian writers of the time portray Aelia Flavia Flacilla as another great Roman woman in the mold of Livia and the Severan Julias.

Theodosius was concerned to avoid the disruptions that always shook the empire whenever there was no clear successor, and determined to establish a dynasty to ensure a peaceful succession within his family. He was fortunate in Flacilla and rewarded her for providing him with two sons by conferring on her the title of Augusta, the first so named since Constantine made his mother Helena an empress. Although the title was hardly a new one, in the elevation of

Flacilla there are some striking precedents that may be noted in the way she is represented on the coins struck in her honor. Flacilla is not shown as a mere Roman matron, but dressed in the *paludamentum* (the imperial purple robe) with the jeweled fibula at her shoulder. This is the clothing of an emperor and military leader. And on her head sits the identical diadem that Theodosius wears. The implication is clear, the Augusta is the equal of Augustus, and his partner not only in the family, but also in the government and the military command of the empire. However, we have to question this portrait of the great Christian matron-warrior. She was undoubtedly charitable, but evidence points to her being weak-willed, terrified of her husband's rages, and molly-coddling of her children when she was with them. Neither of her sons showed even the faintest spark of their determined and intelligent father; perhaps they inherited the spinelessness from the mother. Flacilla's legacy to the women of the dynasty was that they, too, could aspire to the highest offices in the land and, as will become evident, two in particular seized the opportunity: Aelia Eudoxia and Galla Placidia.

The reason for Theodosius's retreat from military duty in 376 is not known. Recent suggestions which have been made that a furious Valentinian dismissed him after the loss of a Pannonian and a Moesian legion to the Sarmatae in Valeria in 374, when he was *Dux Moesiae*, and therefore responsible for the defeat, do not fit the facts as known. As Thomas Hodgkin points out in *The Barbarian Invasions of the Roman Empire*, Theodosius covered himself in glory at this time; and reliable Ammianus is silent on the matter. Besides, Theodosius was apparently still on active military duty when Valentinian died, and his retirement seems to coincide with his father's execution in the following year. It would not be stretching the point too far to suggest that Theodosius did not want to aggravate the jealousy of Valens any more than his victories in Illyricum might already have done, and so prudently made himself as invisible as possible in a part of the empire as far away as he could get from the senior Augustus. In any event, the sabbatical lasted only three years before Gratian recalled Theodosius and gave him command of the East to clear up the unholy mess Valens had made of the Gothic inundation.

An Army from Scratch

It was fortunate for the empire in the days and months following the disaster at Hadrianopolis in August 378 that while barbarians might exact a severe victory over civilized Roman arms, they had ever proved incapable of a cohesive policy afterward or of improving on their tactical advantage. The Goths tried repeatedly to break into the shuttered city, but were driven back by the terrifying Roman catapults and ballistas. Disorganized bands of warriors fell in heaps to the arrows, bolts, and huge stones hurled from the walls. It was a picture to be repeated all over the Balkans. While the Goths held the countryside, they could not break down the cities' defenses, and were incapable of consolidating their position. In not too many days, Constantinople found itself under siege. A stout defense was mounted, much at the exhortation of Valens' widow, Dominica, and a detachment of Saracen cavalry sent by the nomadic queen Mavia all the way from the edges of the provinces of Arabia. Unable to take the capital, the Goths retired and contented themselves with ravaging in every direction, through Thraciae, Daciae, Moesiae, and even into Pannoniae at the very edges of Italy.

Receiving the summons from Gratian, Theodosius immediately set off to meet the young emperor at Sirmium. Whether Theodosius had been warned in advance of Gratian's intentions is not clear, but he appears to have had no hesitation in accepting the rank conferred him on January 19, 379. Gratian raised him to be his colleague in the imperial powers, and granted him all the territories of Valens with the addition of eastern Illyricum, the dioceses of Daciae, Thraciae, and Macedoniae (the designation Moesiae disappears at some point during this period). From Sirmium, Theodosius moved south, skirting the largest concentrations of Gothic marauders, and came to Thessalonica. The city had recently withstood a prolonged siege, but a plague had inflicted great losses among the Goths, who had retreated from the locale; a miracle attributed to the prayers of the saintly Thessalonican Bishop Acholius.

With its access to the Aegean for distant communications and the shortest line to Gratian's Illyrian capital of Sirmium, Theodosius judged Thessalonica to be the place from which to organize the task ahead. He vowed that until he had cleared the Balkans of the barbarians he would not put foot in his capital. Within weeks, the military officers, senators of Constantinople and imperial administrators had convened to pay court to the new Augustus and be

directed in their roles in the battles to come. If a few of these worthies held any suspicion toward the new emperor they only had to compare him to Valens, his timid, indecisive, but vengeful predecessor, to know that in Theodosius they had a man in whom they could put their faith.

The problem he faced, however, was a severe lack of manpower occasioned by the terrible losses at Hadrianopolis. Theodosius overcame the disadvantage through a series of rapid promotions and surrounded himself with a large number of dashing, active officers whom he directed in tactics learned in Britain—guerrilla warfare. As long as a continual stream of short, sharp attacks—hit and run if necessary—could be maintained, the Romans had a chance of shaking the Goths' confidence and at the same time repairing the fallen morale of the Roman soldiers. His critics—and there were a few—were made uneasy by the increase in the numbers of higher ranks: while before it was customary to have two commanders-in-chief of the *comitatenses*, the *magister equitum* and *magister peditum*, now there were five, probably the majority with the horse. In keeping, Theodosius doubled the lower ranks of *duces*, *tribuni* and centurions. This apparently happened without an increase in the total manpower of the army, but in the war being waged good leadership counted for more than sheer manpower. There was another very good reason for filling his *consistorium* with a large number of brave and experienced officers. To bulk out the depleted ranks Theodosius engaged the services of captured Goths, and for them to become a properly organized fighting machine in the Roman style these fierce but ill-disciplined warriors needed an officer they would obey because of his terrifying record on the battlefield.

Recovery of the East

In contrast to the ruined misery of the countryside around Thessalonica, Theodosius lavished magnificence on his senior commanders and the civic dignitaries. While this was a reflection of his princely state and no less than he had been accustomed to, it was also another means of raising the court's morale. The policy did, as a consequence of its cost, put more strain on the region's already ruined finances, and led some doubters to wonder whether there might not come a time when they would crave again the parsimony of a Valens.

The ancient histories give no coherent account of Theodosius's tactics, but there is no doubt that his strategy was a triumph. One example that has survived shows Theodosius's wisdom in selecting Goths who had demonstrated their loyalty and then promoting them. Modares, a Visigoth of royal lineage, was made a *magister* and given command of a detachment of troops. With his knowledge of the local terrain and the moral weakness of his countrymen, his warriors fell on a large band of reveling Goths that had been looting. In their drunkenness, the enemy was unable to rally, and were soon all killed. As many as four thousand wagons and all their women and children were taken. It is the Goth Jordanes, writing a century and a half later, who tells us:

For the emperor, keen in intelligence, strong in courage, and wise in counsel, tempering the severity of his orders by liberality and an affable demeanor, was ever rousing the demoralized army to brave deeds.

On November 17, 379 Theodosius was able to send messengers to all the great cities of the empire announcing a victory over the Goths, the Alans, and the Huns, large groups of the latter having followed the Goths across the Danube. It was not, however, entirely the end of the war. The provinces south of the Balkans, Epirus, Thessalia, and Achaëa, were still overrun by Fritigern's Visigoths, and Ostrogoths were attacking across the Danube into Pannoniae. At the beginning of 380, Theodosius fell seriously ill, and was forced to call on his colleague for help in evicting the barbarians. Gratian advanced to Aquileia, from where he supervised the defense of Pannoniae, while giving to two Franks the command of the attack on the Goths—two men who had already made their presence felt: the *comites* Bauto and Arbogast. The campaign was successful in clearing Macedonia and Thessalia and finally containing the remaining horde along the southern bank of the Danube in the region of Moesia Secundus where, four years previously, Valens had intended to settle them. In the

course of a battle against either Bauto or Arbogast, Fritigern was slain.

Gratian, aware that it would be almost impossible to entirely expel the Goths from Roman territory, and in any case wishing to stand by the bargain made with them by his Uncle Valens, proposed a treaty. Its terms granted the Goths land on which to settle, provided that it was comingled with restored Roman property, that they should become Romanized, and that the men should serve in the army and pledge their sons to the same. In short, the Gothic nation should become *foederati*, or confederates of Rome. On his sickbed, and fearing imminent death, the catechumen Theodosius had called on Acholius to baptize him. Restored to good health later in 380, Theodosius rose from his bed a convinced adherent of the orthodox faith. He also returned to active duty to find that Gratian had already concluded the very contract with the Goths that he had wished for, and he accepted it gratefully. And finally, on November 24, 380, he could make his way to Constantinople and enter his capital in all the state and glory due an *imperator*.

On January 24, 381 he welcomed old Anatharic to the capital. The *iudex*, who had remained to the north of the Danube in keeping with his vow never to set foot on Roman soil, had been forced to break it and flee from those returning Ostrogoths who had been bested by Bauto and Arbogast. Theodosius personally escorted the venerable old man through the city gate and to the imperial palace, and there received his former enemy with great courtesy. A fortnight later Anatharic died, overcome perhaps by the lavishness of his reception and the incredible glory of the capital, or perhaps of a broken heart for the loss of his nation. Theodosius granted him a sumptuous state funeral, which consideration for their old leader further disposed the Goths toward reconciliation.

In Republican days the Roman army was clearly divided into the legionaries, Roman- or Latin-born citizens, and the *auxilia*, drawn from allied nations that had no rights of citizenship but through their efforts might hope to win the right one day. In the intervening centuries, this distinction had all but disappeared, and after Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* became meaningless, since every free-born man in the empire was automatically a citizen. The term remained only to describe units of a lesser standing to the *comitatenses*, such as the native levies that garrisoned many of the frontier forts. However, with the *foederati*, the empire had again created a Republican-style *auxilia*, a large military resource to be

called on when required, none of whose members were Roman citizens but retained their own system of government and administration. There was an important difference to the ancient system in that *foederati* were not required to pay any taxes, which did not endear them to the hard-pressed provincial Romans struggling to recover from the very devastation the Goths had caused. And in this contract between *foederati* and emperor—the grant of land in return for military service—it is possible to see the underpinnings of medieval feudalism, and the inexorable shaping of the Europe to come.

Theodosius in Italy

One of the great boons of Theodosius's reign was peace with the Sassanian empire. His inability to immediately take the field against Maximus in the events that transpired after Gratian's death in 383, and which led to the uneasy accord that left Maximus alone in 384, have already been noted. However, to signal that he had no intention of sharing power with Maximus on any legal basis, at the end of 383 he raised his five-year-old son Arcadius to be his colleague in the imperial powers. Skirmishes with Huns were occupying him on the northern frontier, and in Persia Ardashir II had just been deposed by his nephew, Shapur III.

The new Persian king was an unknown quantity, and Theodosius was unwilling to campaign against Maximus until he knew better what the oriental brew might throw up. At the same time, the Saracens—who had repudiated their previous treaty of 377—resumed raiding the frontier from Arabia to Syria in 383. However, this uprising appears to have been crushed by the *Magister Peditum* Richomeres in a campaign of the same year. As for the Sassanians, Theodosius sent on an embassy to them led by another extraordinary man he had raised up, a full-blooded Vandal called Stilicho. Given the title *Magister Militum per Orientem*, Stilicho traveled to Shapur's court and, after protracted negotiations, reached an accord in 387 that ensured peace between Rome and Ctesiphon for the duration of Theodosius's reign. Since Armenia had always been the rose between the two thorns, Stilicho's winning proposition was to divide it between the two empires. The Roman client king Arsaces (Arshak) retained possession of the western part of the country, while the Persians nominated a Sassanid called Khosro to rule over eastern Armenia. Thus, in the same year, Theodosius was prepared to deal with Maximus when the usurper crossed the Alps to invade Italy.

The events of the battle with Maximus in 388 are related above, and it is the period that Theodosius spent in Italy that concerns us now. Having appointed Arbogast as *Comes Galliae*, Theodosius, his new wife Galla, daughter of Valentinian I, and his infant son Honorius (Arcadius had been left behind in Constantinople) spent the winter with Valentinian II in Mediolanum. In the following year, Theodosius journeyed with Valentinian to Rome. It should have been a joyous occasion for the Roman aristocracy on that day—June 13, 389—to receive after so long a great emperor, but this one was bearing the banner of Christ with which to berate the recusant Romans. It came,

then, as a great relief to find that the senior Augustus intended to wield carrots instead of sticks in his efforts to rid Rome of paganism. A *congarium* to the cheering citizens was tendered with stately affability and good-humored bantering with the crowd. He visited the homes of nobles and commoners alike, and a few days later the assembled senate received him in the Curia (from which no doubt the altar of Nike had been prudently removed to its final and lasting obscurity). The two Augusti then returned to Mediolanum and remained there throughout the rest of that and the following year—the year of the great clash between the emperor and Ambrose, the bishop of Mediolanum.

Neither was present at the events in Thessalonica that sparked Ambrose's righteous fury and led to the first excommunication by a great Church leader of a powerful secular ruler. At Thessalonica, which had suffered so ruinously during the Gothic war, there had been much unrest among the populace. Their resentment was over the quartering of troops in their homes. Roman soldiers had been bad enough in the past, but the barbarian ones were much worse. The situation spiraled out of control when the *magister peditum*, himself a Goth called Botheric, imprisoned the city's most popular charioteer on charges of "abominable immorality," more than likely homosexual acts, of which the Greco-Roman charioteers were frequently accused, although not usually imprisoned for.

Botheric ignored the popular protest at his actions, and the mob attacked the garrison headquarters and cut him down. When Theodosius heard of the insult he flew into a rage. Ambrose attempted to dissuade the emperor from taking vengeance on many for the crimes of only a few, but without undertaking any judicial enquiry, Theodosius ordered *comitatenses* to show the city no mercy. It seems that Theodosius, usually regretfully clement once a rage had subsided, sent another dispatch to countermand his original order, but it arrived too late for Thessalonica. The soldiers chose to wait until a day of races and, when most of Thessalonica's citizens were gathered in the hippodrome, fell on them in a fury. Seven thousand souls lay amid the gore and shambles of their deaths by the evening; some sources double the figure.

A crime on such a scale, a mass murder undertaken without even the semblance of Roman justice could not be overlooked, and Ambrose, who had already had a few clashes with Theodosius over points of religion and the rights of the emperor to dispense justice in

episcopal matters, would not. The bishop refused to meet his emperor face to face but wrote a strong letter, which confirmed his continuing regard for Theodosius but at the same time insisted on a public repentance. Until such was forthcoming, said the bishop, he would withhold communion from Theodosius. If the *comitatus* expected to witness a towering rage, they were to be surprised. On the following Sunday, as the emperor was attempting to enter the basilica, Ambrose stood in the doorway and forbade him passage into the church. Astonishingly, Theodosius appears to have accepted this rebuff meekly, and returned to the palace a saddened man.

However, he would not yet back down, and sent his praetorian prefect, a low-born Gaul called Rufinus—of whom we shall hear more later—to negotiate. On seeing Rufinus, Ambrose commanded him to go away, berating him for being the real criminal who had bent the emperor's mind to commit the crime. On hearing of the failure of his embassy, Theodosius went himself to Ambrose and repented. But Ambrose was unbending: the emperor must express his repentance publicly and pass an edict forbidding the execution of any citizen until after a period of thirty days, in which time either justice or natural mercy should prevail. Theodosius agreed both to this wise law and to his public humiliation.

It was a relief to his troubled spirit to present himself at the basilica, dressed only in sackcloth and unadorned by his imperial diadem, to prostrate himself before the high altar and do penance. But when he was finished, it turned out that Ambrose was not. He pointed out sternly that before Theodosius could receive the communion he must remove himself beyond the altar railing and leave the sacred enclosure, which was reserved for priests. Although Theodosius was only following the procedure of Constantinople, where the emperor as the right of his august person celebrated communion at the altar apart from the mass of citizens, he quietly obeyed Ambrose and accepted his words: "The purple only makes emperors, not priests." It was a turning point for Christendom. A cleric had asserted the rights of the spiritual over the temporal power of the ruler, and in accepting the condemnation and punishment of a priest, the emperor had for the first time recognized an authority greater than his own.

Succession of the Dynasty

After leaving Mediolanum on June 16, 391, Theodosius arrived at Constantinople on November 22, and in the intervening years before the battle of the Frigidus in the latter part of 394, concerned himself with administration. He worked tirelessly to improve the lot of the common man in a way rare among emperors of the fourth century. To the law Ambrose had obliged him to pass, he added that a certain part of any condemned man's estate must go to his children, and that the father's crime must not be held against them. He set standards by which farmers were no longer forced to sell their produce to the state at less than the market rate. But much of his legislation dealt with religious matters. As early as 380, when he was recovering from the illness that had prompted his baptism by Acholius, he had issued an edict that defined the Roman Catholic Church forever. This proclaimed that only those who professed the Nicene creed, the consubstantiality of the Holy Trinity, could be considered Catholic Christians, and all others were pronounced "mad" and "heretic." This edict effectively ended the Arian controversy by outlawing the creed of Arius, and in the following year at the Council of Constantinople it was decreed that Arian churches be handed back to orthodoxy, and that the see of Constantinople should become second only after that of Rome.

The emperor's early tolerance of pagan practices that did not include blood sacrifice, magical auguries, or anything that smelled of treason against the Augustus began to give way to a growing intemperance. He strengthened the existing legislation against sacrifices in 385; in 391 he banned all non-Christian rituals in Rome and Alexandria; and in 392 came the most swingeing edict that outlawed every form of pagan worship throughout the empire, whether in public or in private. The edict of 391 did not, however, lead to the widespread destruction of the old temples, for Theodosius supported the preservation of temples and monuments as useful buildings or as works of art. But in Alexandria the ancient and famous Serapeum, at which Caracalla had fruitlessly sought a cure for his illness, was torn down by official sanction. The blame for this wanton act of destruction is not, perhaps, to be laid entirely at the emperor's feet. His tacit approval was almost certainly obtained by the manipulation of local officials who had already exceeded their authority in pulling down pagan buildings and encouraging the persecution of pagan worshippers. Had he known all the facts,

Theodosius would almost certainly have disapproved, for he never sought to force his subjects into recantation, and he never caused persecution. The epithetical “Great” had previously been awarded to Constantine as the establisher of frontier security and the expander of Roman territory. Theodosius had accomplished the former but added nothing to the empire, even halved Armenia’s client status. So it is for his establishment of the Roman Catholic Church that he is known today as Theodosius the Great.

Neither proscriptions nor confiscations marked the fall of Eugenius in 394. Triumphant, Theodosius entered Mediolanum and pardoned all the usurper’s supporters. The children of Eugenius and Arbogast, although not professing Christians, had taken sanctuary in the basilica, and Ambrose requested the emperor to show them mercy, which he did by handing them into the care of an imperial *notarius*.

Since he was now approaching his fiftieth year, Theodosius turned his attention to the succession. Valentinian II had died childless, so there was no other male heir to complicate matters, and he decided to divide the empire between Arcadius in the East to rule at Constantinople and Honorius in the West at Mediolanum. Whether this was actually intended to be such a formal division as later history has made it is doubtful; as we have seen, such partitions had been made before. But it is not really relevant, since the division was made permanent by the weakness of his sons and the mutual hatred that existed between their chief ministers, Stilicho and Rufinus.

Honorius, who was only ten, was at the time resident with Arcadius in Constantinople, his older brother not yet seventeen. Having made his decision and appointed Stilicho regent, Theodosius immediately sent for his younger son to attend him. The timing for a journey was poor. The winter snows had set in, and so it was only in mid-January that Honorius arrived at Mediolanum, in the company of his cousin Serena, Stilicho’s wife, to discover that his father had fallen dangerously ill. Theodosius recovered at the sight of his young son sufficiently to attend the games held to celebrate the boy’s safe arrival, but collapsed during the racing and was taken to his bedchamber. On the following night of January 17, 395 Rome’s last great emperor passed away, and his death was the “beginning of the end of all things.”

Arcadius

Flavius Arcadius

[Co-Augustus, East January 383; Augustus January 18, 395 to May 1, 408]

Honorius

Flavius Honorius

[Co-Augustus, West 393, Augustus January 18, 395 to August 26, 423]

For forty days Theodosius's embalmed body lay in state in the palace before it was transferred to the basilica on February 25 for a High Mass presided over by Ambrose, whose funeral oration still survives. In it, Ambrose reminded the mourners of the deceased emperor's Christian humility after the Thessalonica massacre:

Stripping himself of every emblem of royalty he publicly in church bewailed his sin. That public penance, which private individuals shrink from, an emperor was not ashamed to perform; nor was there afterward a day on which he did not grieve for his mistake.

After the mass the imperial cortège began the journey to Constantinople and Arcadius, leaving Honorius at Mediolanum in the care of Stilicho. Both boys had spent their lives to this point under the shadow of the purple, for Theodosius was elevated only shortly after the birth of Arcadius in 377 or 378. Arcadius was made co-Augustus in January of 383 at the age of about five, the year before the birth of Honorius. When Theodosius campaigned against Magnus Maximus in 387–88 Arcadius was placed under the Eastern praetorian prefect Tatian, who effectively—although not immaculately—ruled in the emperor's name. This situation prevailed until Theodosius returned from Mediolanum after his sojourn in Italy in 391, bringing with him his prefect, Rufinus, who now aspired to add to his own title that of Tatian's. Through various subterfuges, Rufinus secured Tatian's deposal and took his place in 392. Thus it was under the regency of the ruthless and ambitious Rufinus that Arcadius had been left in 394 when Theodosius again went West to confront Eugenius and Arbogast.

The Vandal Stilicho's star had risen rapidly after his successful embassy to Persia in 387. In the following year, he had been allowed to marry Serena—the emperor's favorite niece and his adopted daughter. Stilicho maintained that Theodosius had given the care of both his sons to him, and in this he claimed technical seniority over Rufinus. However, his geographical location meant that his principal care was for Honorius. Stilicho was no less ambitious than his Eastern

rival, but knowing he was a full-blooded barbarian, he contented himself as had Arbogast with ruling through his ward; not so Rufinus. Throughout Constantinople and the East he was notorious for his avarice and corruption, and used the high office to accumulate great wealth in preparation for his ultimate ambition: the purple. If the eighteen-year-old Arcadius had been even the half of his father, Rufinus would have been put in his place, but the boy was slothful and stupid, possibly because of his closeted upbringing. Small of stature and swarthy of complexion, Arcadius's character was as weak as his intellect. When a man of feeble temperament is ruler of half the known world, he is bound to attract men of ambition like a lamp attracts insects, and so it was that Rufinus was not alone in his scheming.

His opponent was a eunuch of far lower station but in much better proximity to the light, Eutropius the *praepositus sacri cubiculi* (superintendent of the sacred bedchamber). Elderly, bald-headed, and wrinkled, he had formerly enjoyed much success as a catamite and a pimp before working his way up through the imperial household. But he shared Rufinus's lack of scruples and his overweening ambition—and he detested the prefect. The next step in Rufinus's plan was the marriage of his daughter to the emperor. This Eutropius intended to prevent at any cost, but of course he had no daughters of his own to put forward, so he settled on a girl of Frankish descent—some sources claim she was the daughter of *Comes* Bauto. A good-looking young woman, her Greek name was Eudoxia and she had acquired a good education and a deal of cosmopolitan sophistication. Taking advantage of an absence from the capital of Rufinus, who had urgent business to attend to in Antioch, Eutropius aroused Arcadius's interest in Eudoxia, and by the time the prefect returned to the capital, the pair was formally betrothed. The wedding took place on April 27, 395, just over two months since the death of Theodosius the Great.

Alaric's Gothic Rebellion

At about the time of the wedding the Goths living in the empire rose in revolt. Their leader was a twenty-five-year-old called Alaric. Born probably in about 370 at Peucé, an island in the delta of the Danube, Alaric was of the noble Visigothic family of the Balthi. He had accompanied the army of Theodosius and taken part with thousands of his countrymen in the battle of the Frigidus. But the great emperor's death broke the spirit of the Romano-Gothic contract in the minds of many battle-hardened Goths. And the penurious policies of Rufinus—and probably also of Stilicho—toward the *foederati* who were still sitting in Italy contributed to a searing anger at their treatment. There is a suggestion that Alaric, a commander of an auxiliary unit, expected to receive a senior position from Theodosius if the war against Eugenius were to be successful, and that either Stilicho or Rufinus denied him in this.

Alaric could clearly see an opportunity, for almost all the army was still in the West and the East lay undefended. The Visigoths saluted him as their leader and made him their king. These troops were no longer the disordered barbarians who had entered the empire in 376. Some twenty years of Roman discipline had instilled in them a fighting character that rivaled any Roman legion. In a matter of weeks, the Visigoths spread havoc throughout Daciae and Thraciae, and advanced to within a short distance of Constantinople. The city was saved by the intervention of Rufinus, who bribed Alaric to go away, and the Visigoths turned their attentions to the ravaging of Macedoniae.

Alarmed at the close call, using Arcadius as his mouthpiece, Rufinus ordered Stilicho to return the legions of the Eastern army to him. The fragments of contemporary history are maddeningly unclear about Stilicho's intentions during this confused period, and his actions often appear to be contradictory. He complied with Arcadius's demand, but on his own terms. Strengthening the Eastern legions with detachments of his own soldiers, Stilicho led the whole army into Illyricum. This was obviously intended to be interpreted as a threat to Rufinus, but instead of heading for Constantinople Stilicho turned south to pursue Alaric and cornered the Visigoths, who had taken shelter behind strong fortifications. Perhaps he wanted to subdue the barbarians before continuing to advance on Constantinople to depose Rufinus and take up his regency of Arcadius. If so, his next actions seem to disprove both arguments. Instead of besieging Alaric, Stilicho

gave way to a further demand from Arcadius for the return at once of his army...but without Stilicho, who was to return to Mediolanum.

Stilicho dispatched the Eastern troops toward Constantinople under the command of a Gothic officer called Gainas and, having detached his own units, returned to Italy. Free to recommence pillaging, Alaric's Visigoths swarmed through Thessalia, and advancing through the famous pass of Thermopylae, razed towns and villages in Boetia and Attica. Events at Athens are not clear, but in some way the local dignitaries managed to come to terms with Alaric, and he left the city unharmed. The Visigoths next turned south into the Peloponnese. City after city fell, including Sparta. That most ancient enemy of Athens and once glory of the Greek fighting spirit was razed to the ground.

Stilicho waited only long enough to recruit from along the Rhine to return to the Peloponnese and confront the Visigoths at Pholoe, not far from Olympia. Alaric's men could not believe that the Romans had returned so swiftly and, taken by surprise, they were completely surrounded. And then what happened? Nothing. This confrontation of the brave Stilicho and the wily Alaric remains one of Roman history's great mysteries. Stilicho deliberately let the Visigoths escape. The sources are patchy, and where they exist, downright improbable as to the reasons for what happened. Was Rufinus playing a game by bribing Alaric to go and ravage in Illyricum to disconcert Stilicho? Was Stilicho returning the ball by sending Alaric back toward the East to upset Rufinus? The suggestion that has been made that Stilicho did not want to war on Alaric because he viewed the Visigoths as a potentially useful *foederati* army—and in fact he did employ them shortly after—does not stand close examination. After all, had he wanted Alaric for an ally he would surely have sent an embassy to make a deal, not gathered an army and taken it all the way to Achaëa. We are, therefore, left with the mystery. Stilicho returned to Italy, and Alaric concluded a treaty with Arcadius whereby he was awarded the title *Magister Militum per Illyricum*, effectively confirming him in a prefecture he had already taken by force. It was a move designed to create a buffer state that would keep Stilicho out of Eastern affairs.

[32. Link to: Stilicho versus Alaric](#)

[Family Tree: House of Valentinian & Theodosian Dynasty](#)

Hubris Strikes

Rufinus, however, never lived to see this treaty. Under the influence of the eunuch Eutropius, Arcadius's beautiful barbarian empress Eudoxia had used her charms to mold her husband into hostility toward the prefect. Rufinus had persuaded himself that Arcadius would make him his colleague and was pressing the emperor as hard as he dared. At this point the Eastern army under the Goth Gainas arrived and halted outside the Golden Gate, where traditionally emperors came out to greet their returning troops. On November 27, 395 Arcadius appeared, accompanied by Rufinus, who expected his elevation that same day. Imperious and arrogant, the praetorian prefect swaggered among the soldiers failing to notice how they were closing in around him. A moment later a sword flashed, followed by others, and he fell dead. According to the historian Claudian, the man who struck the first blow cried out: "With this sword, Stilicho strikes you!" What is true is that Gainas was an ally of Stilicho and probably planned the assassination partly as a tribute to their friendship and almost certainly to place himself in an advantageous position at Arcadius's court. With Rufinus dead, feeble Arcadius was ruled by three persons: his Frankish empress Eudoxia, Eutropius the eunuch (who quickly seized the rank of praetorian prefect for himself), and Gainas the Goth, friend of Stilicho and now *Magister Militum per Orientem*.

Under Eutropius the government became more corrupt than ever, with the open selling of offices throughout the Eastern empire. In 399 he was nominated for a consulship—a purely meaningless title by this time, it was still one to which the nobility aspired and which the emperors frequently held. It filled the senatorial class of Constantinople with disgust that a former slave, prostitute, and a eunuch should so debase the value of the office; but it was to be his last. Since he had gained full control of Arcadius, Eutropius had pursued a vigorous policy of excluding military men from the emperor, particularly the German officers, and it was Gainas who decided that he must be terminated.

In the spring a revolt broke out among the Gothic settlers in Phrygia under *Comes* Tribigild, and Gainas went to handle the situation. But he colluded with Tribigild, and sent back a message to the emperor that the Goths were offering to return to peace for a reasonable settlement—the head of Eutropius. Arcadius was not happy with this suggestion, but Eudoxia urged him to agree. Eutropius's continual reminders that she owed her position to his good offices had

become irksome, and she was jealous of the eunuch's hold over her husband; she wanted him dead too. Arcadius agreed, and Eutropius fled to find sanctuary in the church of St. Sophia. Although he was safe there, he was also trapped, and eventually gave himself up in return for his life. Arcadius exiled Eutropius to Cyprus, but he was soon recalled, tried at Chalcedon, and executed in the autumn of 399.

Gainas fared little better on his return to the capital in 400. For some six months he tried to initiate his own primacy, including a failed attempt to seize the imperial palace, after which he was forced to withdraw from the city. Before all of his forces had left, hostile elements shut the gates, trapping about seven thousand of his Gothic troops inside, whereon the mob, now thoroughly fed up with barbarian soldiers, slaughtered them; many were burned alive in a church in which they had taken refuge. Gainas and his remnant force wandered in a westerly direction through Thraciae, but they suffered a rebuff while trying to cross the Hellespont into Asia, and turned north. Somewhere on the northern border Gainas fell into the hands of King Uldin of the Huns, who took off his head and sent it to Arcadius as a grisly goodwill present.

Stilicho and Alaric

In the West, Italy—and especially Rome—had suffered at the hands of the Moor Gildo, who had once befriended the usurper Magnus Maximus. After the revolt of Firmus in 374, which Theodosius the elder had suppressed, his brother Gildo had acquired some of the original powers of Firmus. During the reign of Valentinian II, Gildo managed to assume the title of *Comes Africae* and came to control the provinces of Mauretania, Numidia, and Africa Proconsularis. Then in 397 Gildo cut off the grain supply to Rome. Stilicho organized an army to cross the Mediterranean to retake the provinces. He entrusted its command to another of Gildo's brothers, Mascezel, who had good cause for his sibling hatred. Opposed to Gildo's ambitions, Mascezel had deserted to Italy, and to punish the defection Gildo had Mascezel's two sons slain.

He sailed in 398 with some thirty-six thousand troops to confront seventy thousand under Gildo on the border of Proconsularis and Numidia. Here, apparently he was visited in a dream by the recently deceased Bishop Ambrose, who informed him of the place of victory: "Here," and the time: "Three days hence." The Roman army waited and prayed, and then attacked the superior force of Gildo. Due to one of those fateful events that often do more to determine the outcome of a battle than tactics or the power of arms, this conflict was over in moments. An impetuous standard-bearer of the enemy dashed forward and received a wound. As he fell, so did the standard, and the African army thought Gildo had given the signal to surrender. Gildo was put to flight and either committed suicide, or was taken and executed.

Not much has been said about Honorius because—despite his relatively lengthy reign—in truth there is little to reveal. Morally destitute and otherwise incapable of any real emotion, he remained a remote figure securely wrapped up by Stilicho in the palace at Mediolanum and later at Ravenna. In his later years, he became engaged in the only activity—apart from a little sport in his youth—that interested him: raising chickens. Shortly before the African expedition, he married Stilicho's daughter Maria, which clearly placed Stilicho at the peak of his influence and power. However, the beginning of the fifth century—the year 1153 by Roman reckoning—also marks the beginning of the end that Theodosius's death foretold. In the early summer of 401 Alaric attacked Italy from Illyricum in concert with an invasion through Raetia by the pagan Ostrogoth Radagaisius. Stilicho seems to have countered Radagaisius with

comparative ease—although it would not be the last Rome would see of this particular barbarian. Alaric was another matter.

Had the senate and Honorius known the secret of this vibrant thirty-year-old's heart, disaster might have been avoided. Alaric, like so many invaders who came after him, did not seek the destruction of the Roman empire. He wanted to be adopted by it, to form his own nation within its boundaries and thereby become like one of the old Latin states, offering civic obligations and military service in return for his own *imperium* within the state. But to the Romans, the Visigoths were rapine savages. A huge army with thousands of women and children—an entire nation in fact—poured through the passes of the Julian Alps into northern Italy. Bypassing Aquileia and Ravenna, they turned west toward Mediolanum and short of the Western capital, at the small village of Pollentia (Pollenzo), met Stilicho's army on Easter Sunday, 402. The battle was bloody and indecisive, but Stilicho turned the Visigoths and they retreated eastward.

Stilicho was technically the victor, but he allowed Alaric to retire over the passes and into Illyricum without pursuit; the third occasion on which he had let the Visigothic king escape. The reason for this clemency would seem to be an agreement the two leaders reached intended to further Stilicho's desire to extend his control over Arcadius and the Eastern empire. In order to reach Constantinople Stilicho would have to fight his way through territory held by the Visigoths; better to make Alaric his ally.

There were two consequences of the invasion worth noting. First, Mediolanum had proven too vulnerable to attack by roving barbarians, so to better protect the emperor's person Stilicho selected Ravenna for the new imperial court. Ravenna was geographically less accessible to marauders and it was surrounded on the landward side by lakes and marshy ground, making it difficult to invest. Even if the city should come under attack its proximity to the Adriatic and the great Roman naval base made provisioning—as well as a quick escape—possible. From this point on Ravenna became the capital of the Western empire. Second, Alaric's avowed intention, as divined by the pattern of his movements, had been to reach Rome. Knowledge of this panicked the citizens, who clamored for better protection. Stilicho ordered a further reinforcement of the city gates and the raising of the Aurelian Wall where needed, but ironically the strength of Rome's fortifications would ultimately count for less than its citizens' weak fortitude.

In 404 Honorius and Stilicho paid Rome a visit. It was only the fifth time in a century that the ancient capital had seen an emperor within the sacred *pomerium*. Young Honorius seems to have made a good impression on the Romans, noble and common alike, as he stood beside his father-in-law and his wife Maria. Her younger brother Eucherius followed behind them, wearing only the garb of a wealthy *privatus*, because Stilicho was wary of giving his son any imperial insignia. The visit was also memorable because it marked the last ever games of gladiatorial combat. Although banned since the edict of Constantine, their allure still tempted the Roman mob. To this celebration the emperor was invited and, much as a modern tourist might be driven to watch a cock-fight while shuddering at the outcome, Honorius accepted. At some point during the height of the bloodshed, a monk walked firmly into the ring and began to separate the gladiators. The crowd, furious at his temerity, shouted and booed, and the monk soon became a martyr. But he did not give his life in vain. Honorius was so moved by the scene that he recognized the monk as a saint, and decreed that even in the eternal city there should be no more blood spilled in the arena.

Religious Discord and Frozen River

In the following year Radagaisius appeared again at the head of an army, said to number two hundred thousand, intent on gorging itself on the spoils of the empire. Stilicho raised his army of thirty legions, supported by King Uldin and his Huns and detachments of Visigoths, probably on loan from Alaric as a part of the concordat. Radagaisius made the error of advancing toward Rome across the Appenines, where the Roman legions hemmed the invaders in the valleys and forced them to starvation. Eventually the Ostrogoths melted away and Radagaisius was captured and put to death.

If Stilicho needed a pretext for invading Arcadius's sphere of influence, a developing religious dispute between the Churches of East and West provided one. The cause was the outspoken John Chrysostom, the bishop of Constantinople (398–404). Like Ambrose, he was forthright in his views, especially when it came to the lascivious behavior of the Augusta Eudoxia. With good reason she loathed Chrysostom, whose name is the Greek for “golden mouth,” since he openly referred to her from the pulpit as a “Jezebel.” Nor was the bishop always popular with some of the capital's aristocrats and wealthy citizens, at whose foppery and extravagance he continually railed. In 403 he fell foul of ecclesiastical politics when the jealous Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria (385–412) persuaded the synod at the Council of Chalcedon to depose him from his see. Chrysostom appealed to Arcadius, but Eudoxia bent her submissive husband to ratify the decision, and the bishop was exiled to Bithynia.

However, the common people loved their godly prelate and riots broke out that became so threatening Arcadius hastily recalled Chrysostom. Unfortunately exile had not silvered his pious but insufferable tongue. Fearing further riots if he again banished the troublesome bishop, the emperor compromised by having Chrysostom barred from his churches. At Easter 404, when some two thousand catechumens, unable to take their baptism from the bishop in a church, gathered instead at the Baths of Constantine and became unruly, soldiers were called in to restore order. This was done so harshly that it turned into a slaughter, for which Chrysostom was blamed and banished again on June 24. His supporters saw the hand of divine retribution when Eudoxia died of a miscarriage on October 6.

Chrysostom appealed to Pope Innocent I (401–17) in Rome, who convoked a Latin synod that unanimously agreed to overturn the

banishment. Innocent and Honorius insisted that Arcadius restore Chrysostom to his see, and reproved the Eastern emperor for his incompetent mishandling of the business. Arcadius deigned his brother no reply. But he responded by imprisoning a delegation of Latin bishops dispatched to attempt a settlement and subjecting them to humiliation before sending them back empty-handed. The rift was complete and condemned the Eastern Church to an inferior status. Chrysostom was never recalled and died in his place of exile in September 407.

In the West, the Church triumphed over the State when the indomitable Ambrose had humbled mighty Theodosius. However, in Constantinople the similar clash of wills between the weakling emperor Arcadius and his bishop had a very different outcome. The humbling of John Chrysostom before the emperor came to characterize the place of the Church in the Eastern orthodoxy as being subservient to the earthly power of the divinely empowered emperor. In turn, this led to the Byzantine emperor being head of both the Church and State.

Arcadius's appalling treatment of the ecclesiastic delegation was sufficient for Stilicho to justify declaring war in 406. Alaric had been preparing for some time, awaiting the order to attack Constantinople. In the event, the only hostile action to take place was the blockading of the Eastern empire's shipping from Italian ports, because Stilicho received alarming news that changed everything.

Increasing pressure from Huns on their own eastern borders forced the tribes of Vandals, Alans, Suevi, and Burgundi massing along the banks of the Rhine to take advantage of the particularly harsh winter of 406/407. For tense weeks, the thinly stretched *limitanei* had stared at the water's sluggish flow as it began to freeze. And then the unthinkable happened. The great waterway froze over solidly, rendering one of Rome's natural barriers wide open. The warriors crossed the ice to the west bank on a wide front. At Moguntiacum (Mainz) the severely weakened Roman garrison was overwhelmed and all Galliae lay open for the taking. A few weeks later Constantine, *comes Britannicae*, crossed from Britain to Gaul, ostensibly to deal with the barbarian invasion. Instead, he proclaimed himself Augustus Constantine III, set up court at Arelate (Arles), and soon extended his power to the edges of Spain.

The situation was desperate. Stilicho simply did not have the forces to deal with either threat; although he did send a close friend and one

of his best generals, a Goth named Sarus, in command of a unit of his fellow countrymen to attack Constantine, an expedition that enjoyed some small success (see the next section). But then events at Constantinople and in Italy overtook Stilicho. On the first of May 408 Arcadius died of unknown causes at the age of thirty-one, leaving the Eastern empire in the hands of his seven-year-old son Theodosius II. Shortly after this event, Alaric's army marched and encamped itself on the Italian border. The Visigothic king sent an embassy to the senate at Rome (he always seems to have considered the now-parochial city as the center of the empire) demanding recompense for his costs in fitting out the expedition against Arcadius. At first the senators refused to make any payment, but Stilicho's counsel prevailed and gold sufficient for Alaric's immediate needs was handed over. And in further compensation for the campaign's cancellation Stilicho dispatched the Visigoths to deal with Constantine in Galliae. He no longer needed Alaric for his ambitions in the East and, reminding the court of his pledge to Theodosius the Great, planned to go to Constantinople to take up the regency of Theodosius II.

But Stilicho had overstepped the mark. The Christians at court had been righteously appalled by the haste with which he had married his second daughter, Thermantia, to Honorius earlier in the year after her sister, the empress Maria, had died. Among the Italians there was a growing resentment that a barbarian Vandal should know his place and not set himself up above both emperors. And the troops had become restless at Stilicho's preferment of barbarians, and all at his increasingly harsh discipline. The discontent festered and eventually resulted in a mutiny at Ticinum (Pavia), which Stilicho put down, but his threat—not carried out—to enact a decimation, convinced those counseling the emperor that his *magister militum* had lost the affection of the soldiers. Too, the signal lack of success against the usurper Constantine and the apparent abandonment of Galliae to the barbarians had lost him the faith of the people. When the hostile minister Olympius began whispering in the emperor's ear, Stilicho's days were numbered.

Rumors were put about that Stilicho's real intention was to place his son Eucherius on the Eastern throne in place of Theodosius II. While this hardly fits the character of the man, there is no denying that as the descendant of Theodosius the Great by Stilicho's marriage to Serena, Eucherius had an imperial pedigree that his Vandal father did not. At this point even Stilicho's best officers abandoned his

doomed cause, including his friend Sarus, whose betrayal was the most bitter, since he made a night raid on Stilicho's tent intending to kill his commander, only to find that he had fled to Ravenna. And it was in Ravenna that Stilicho was arrested by an officer called Heraclianus, tried, found guilty and executed on August 23, 408.

At this point it is expedient to go back to the situation in Galliae at the beginning of 407 and follow the campaigns of the usurping Constantine III.

[*Usurper early spring 407; co-Augustus West 408 to September 18, 411*]

When Magnus Maximus crossed from Britain to attack Gratian in 383, his removal of Roman troops weakened the diocese, and put a greater strain on the garrisons along Hadrian's Wall and those defending the *Litus Saxonicum* of the southeast from Saxon sea-raiders. The almost continual sense of dread led to conflict between the remaining military units, their commanders, and the civilian administration. There seemed to be an increasing isolation from the center of Roman power and a feeling that Roman Britanniae might well have to soon fend for itself. It is understandable, then, that the island had become a "province fertile in usurpers." (Jerome, *Epistle to Ctesiphon*.)

More worryingly, the military officers and their largely Gallic troops knew full well how concerns in matters further to the east were weakening the Rhine defenses and the Raetian *limes*. If the barbarians were to breach the frontier, Britain would become cut off, and their homes throughout Gaul would be ravaged. So it was, in the reign of weak Honorius and the Vandal Stilicho, that a series of upheavals shook the island. In 406 the troops hailed their commander—known only as Marcus—emperor, but he was assassinated shortly after. Stilicho's pressing demands for further troop reductions in Britain to replace those he was taking from the Rhine may have sparked this revolt. Not long after another officer called Gratianus was acclaimed. His reign lasted a bare four months, before he too was murdered at the start of 407. By this stage there were few senior officers of any ability left, and news of the breach at Moguntiacum spread panic among the island's bureaucrats. They chose a "common soldier" of ability—he was probably a centurion—by the name of Constantinus and raised him to the purple with the appellation Constantine III in the spring of 407. If the civilians hoped he would now provide some security for the diocese, they were to be sorely mistaken. Constantine moved quickly, crossing the Channel to Gesoriacum, and taking virtually all the mobile army of Britain with him, leaving the island near-undefended.

The disaster at Moguntiacum spelled the end of the Roman hegemony in the provinces of Galliae. The great host that crossed the frozen river on the last day of 406 consisted of Vandals, Suevi, and Alans, with the Burgundi soon following the initial crossings. The German tribes fanned out across Galliae, took Aquitania by 409 and

crossed the Pyrenees into urbanized Spain, homeland of the Theodosian dynasty, where they soon set up competing kingdoms.

It is to be doubted that Constantine III had much effect on the barbarian invasion, or even that he could have done much to oppose them had he wished. Over the next few years we have to imagine that the old Gallo-Hispanic provinces brought to heel by Julius Caesar were awash with different competing tribes whose long envy of Rome made them want the mantle of Roman civilization more than plunder. Plunder, however, they also took as they dodged between the ambitions of competing Roman usurpers and the occasional armies sent against them from Italy, including Alaric's Visigoths, who had been dispatched by Stilicho to confront the double threat of barbarians and Constantine. (These, however, soon returned to the easier pickings in Italy.) The confusion must have been incomprehensible.

Into this violently bubbling human broth came Constantine, bent on taking the throne from Honorius. His Gallic troops, having discovered their towns and homes destroyed, were reduced to virtually destitute wandering nomads, merely another "tribe" on the move. Constantine probably came to an agreement with the barbarians that left them free to ravage the west and central regions of Galliae, while he sent his two generals Justinianus and the Frank Nebiogastes to lead the vanguard down the Rhône valley. Here, he was able to garner the as yet unharmed and prosperous cities into his empire and take over their administration.

It was at this point that Stilicho sent the Gothic officer Sarus to check Constantine's further progress. At first he enjoyed a great success and defeated Justinianus in battle, while Nebiogastes was lured into a trap and murdered under the flag of truce outside Valentia (Valence). Sarus then attempted to besiege Constantine in Valentia, but the usurper's center and rearguard under the admirable command of Edobich the Frank and a Briton named Gerontius forced Sarus to raise the siege and then beat a retreat back over the Alps. Further humiliation was heaped on him when he was forced to hand over all the collected booty to the brigands who held the high passes in order to buy a safe passage into Italy.

In May 408 Constantine reached Arelate and made it his capital. During the summer he determined to prevent the development of a war on two fronts by making a pre-emptive strike on Spain, where cousins of Honorius were gathering a rag-tag army against him.

Meanwhile forces in Italy were assembling to mount a counterattack. Constantine now called for his monastic son Constans to leave his seclusion and join him in Arelate. When Constans complied, he was made Caesar and given the command of detachments under Gerontius to take Spain from the Theodosians. Constans' force was by far the superior and the cousins were defeated without difficulty. Two, Didymus and Theodosiolus, were captured, while two others, Lagodius and Verianus, escaped by ship and fled to Constantinople.

Rome's Fall

Constans left his wife and household at Caesaraugusta (Zaragoza) under the care of Gerontius and returned to Arelate to discover that the threatened Roman counterattack had not materialized. This was due to the mutiny at Ticinum that shortly led to Stilicho's execution, and to the events in Italy that transpired as a consequence. The Italian troops' hatred of their German colleagues spilled over and in Rome they began slaughtering the families of the *foederati*, including recruits from Radagaisius's defeated force. In desperation, those that escaped fled to the eastern Italian coast, where Alaric was roaming unchecked through Etruria. As their only hope of refuge, an estimated thirty thousand Germans flocked to his standard, leaving Honorius in Ravenna without any significant military power beyond the small force of Sarus and his Gothic troops, who had escaped the fate of their countrymen in Rome. Constantine seized this opportunity to send envoys to Ravenna offering his support to the feeble emperor. Honorius eagerly recognized Constantine as his distant colleague and co-Augustus, and the two were joint consuls for 409. Little good it did Honorius.

With Stilicho gone and Honorius's army in disarray or absent without leave, Alaric returned, spurning the attractions of Aquileia, Mediolanum, and Ravenna, intent on reaching that goal he had always desired—Rome. Unopposed, the Visigoths ravaged the countryside and, in September 408, stood before the ancient city's mighty walls. Of course, Alaric had none of the Romans' clever siege engines, but he was content to blockade the city and wait. Inside, the citizens prayed for relief from Ravenna, but none came because Honorius had no intention of committing his few and uncertain forces to rescue the old capital from its fate.

As winter approached the food ran out, and shortly before Christmas Alaric accepted a bribe to go away: five thousand pounds of gold, thirty thousand pounds of silver, three thousand pounds of pepper, and thousands more of hides and silk clothing. Alaric raised the siege and marched his army north, but only as far as Ariminum (Rimini), where the Visigoths encamped while their king negotiated with the emperor for the territories of Venetia and Histria, Dalmatia, and Noricum. For once in his life Honorius showed some spirit and, despite the contrary counsel of his ministers, refused any such deal. Strangely, Alaric considered his options and lowered his demands to the territory of Noricum. Still Honorius refused to budge. This firm

stand was supported by his general Sarus, whose real reason for defiance was a deadly blood-feud with Alaric and especially with Alaric's brother-in-law Ataulfus (Athaulf), for some slight he had suffered at their hands in the past.

Baffled by the emperor's obduracy, Alaric turned again to the south and marched on Rome, but this time he informed its citizens that he had no intention of putting them to the sword and burning the city, he only wanted to overthrow Honorius. Faced with a second siege and the ingratitude of an emperor who had offered no help, the senate—with Alaric's approval—elevated the *praefectus urbi*, an intelligent, art-loving Greek named Priscus Attalus, as Augustus. Attalus had the pagan vote because of his tolerant attitude, and his Arian baptism commended him to the Goths, who had remained faithful to the promise made to Valens to adhere to Arianism. Everything was now in place, with Alaric as Attalus's *magister militum*, to proceed to Ravenna and depose Honorius, but for two unexpected events. The emperor's young nephew, Theodosius II, responded generously to his uncle's appeal for help, and out of the blue ships arrived at Ravenna carrying six Byzantine legions—forty thousand men. Buoyed up by this new, loyal army, Honorius withdrew the offer he had been forced to make of sharing power with Attalus. And in Africa, on which Rome entirely depended for its grain, the governor Heraclianus (the officer who had executed Stilicho) refused to supply any further provisions to the rebellious city. Alaric demanded that detachments be sent immediately to Carthage to depose Heraclianus, but Attalus honorably though unwisely refused to send barbarians against a Roman province.

With his patience exhausted, in the early summer of 410, having publicly stripped Attalus of his purple, Alaric again enclosed the city in a siege. This time, there was little delay, and toward the end of August, aided from within the walls, the Goths burst in through the Salarian Gate at the foot of the Pincian hill. For three days Rome was sacked. It was the first time for nearly eight hundred years a foreign foe had taken the city, although the disaster hardly impinged on the emperor. As noted earlier, rearing chickens is said to be the only occupation of Honorius that gripped his torpid imagination—a fact that appears to have been well known even as far away as Britain. There is a story told of how he received the news of Rome's sacking by Alaric that, while undoubtedly apocryphal, indicates the low esteem in which his contemporaries held him. A chamberlain rushed into his presence crying out, "Roma has perished!" The distraught emperor

looked up and replied, “Roma perished? It is not an hour since she was feeding out of my hand.” When it was explained that it was only the city that had been destroyed, the relieved Honorius said, “I thought you meant that I had lost my bird Roma.”

Surprisingly, the destruction in Rome was restricted because Alaric had issued instructions that no church was to be damaged and no citizen who freely surrendered was to be harmed. Nevertheless, the Visigoths were not angels, and doubtless many suffered at their hands. When the three days were over, taking Honorius’s half-sister Galla Placidia with him, Alaric marched his army toward the south of Italy in order to make preparations to transport the Goths to Sicily and then on to Carthage. His plan was to deal with Heraclianus and relieve Rome of the impending famine. But he got no further than Cosentius (Cosenza) when he was stricken with a fever, and the great Visigothic king died a few days later.

The year 409, when he shared the consulship with Honorius, was the high-water mark of Constantine III’s success. By September, the barbarians who had crashed across the Rhine and had spent the intervening two years ravaging the provinces of Galliae, had reached the Pyrenees, where they came up against Constantine’s garrisons in the passes. In short order, they overwhelmed the Romans and poured into Spain. Constantine was about to send his son Constans to handle the crisis when word arrived that his *Magister Militum* Gerontius had rebelled and proclaimed his own creature called (another) Maximus, who may also have been his son, as co-Augustus. He then made a compact with some of the barbarians who had encountered Constantine’s garrisons and enrolled them in his army with promises of the booty to be gained in Arelate. And in the year of Rome’s sacking, Gerontius advanced into Narbonensis, with Constans taking a detachment to go and meet him. This was not the only disaster facing Constantine. Left to its own devices the diocese of Britanniae, facing increasing Saxon raids along the southern coasts and incursions of Scots and Picts in the north, revolted against Constantine’s nominal control, and the Britons expelled his tax collectors and officials. At this point the island passed entirely from any form of Roman control and became, in the words of one contemporary, “an island ruled by tyrants.”

In a final, desperate gamble, Constantine gathered his remaining forces and crossed the Alps in the summer of 410, encouraged by the entreaties of Honorius’s *Magister Equitum* Allobich, who wanted

Honorius replaced by a more capable ruler. However, Allobich was suspected of the connivance and executed, leaving Constantine to turn around and retreat to Arelate. Constans fared no better, being driven back from the Pyrenees by Gerontius, who besieged him at Vienna. The city capitulated early in 411, and Constans was put to death. Gerontius now pressed on and besieged Arelate. Constantine was left without any capable officers since the defection of his praetorian prefect Decimius Rusticus to the cause of another usurper, Jovinus (see the next section).

But now another man entered the picture. Flavius Constantius, a general worthy of Stilicho, had placed his services at the command of Honorius. At the head of a reorganized Roman army, Constantius descended from the Alps and fell on the besieging troops of Gerontius, putting them to flight. Constantine still held on in newly besieged Arelate, hoping for reinforcements under his Frankish *Magister Equitum* Edobich, who was raising recruits from among his countrymen in northwestern Galliae. Sadly for Constantine, Constantius got wind of the stratagem, and defeated Edobich, after which Constantine's scattered Rhine garrisons defected to Jovinus.

Before his surrender, Constantine III took holy orders and became a priest, and then on receiving promises of safe conduct for himself and his youngest son Julianus, opened the gates. Constantius honored his pledge to spare Arelate and its inhabitants, but Constantine and Julianus were sent under escort to Ravenna. However, before reaching the city, soldiers from Ravenna met the party, bearing orders to execute the "usurper," and the late Augustus was beheaded on the spot, together with his son, on September 18, 411. It seems strange to relate, but their heads were sent all the way to Carthage, there to be prominently displayed as a warning to all anti-emperors. This signal, however, did not dissuade Heraclianus, who had held loyally to Honorius in the arrest and execution of Stilicho and against Alaric, from raising the standard of rebellion himself in 413. He sailed with a vast fleet for Italy, but perhaps his heart was not in revolt, for when he was met by *Comes* Marinus, he faltered and abandoned his fleet to return to Carthage in one ship, where he was immediately arrested and put to death—an appropriate revenge for his murder of Stilicho.

Constantius III

Flavius Constantius

[Co-Augustus, West February 8, 421 to September 2, 421]

Despite all the setbacks Honorius survived on the Western throne longer than an emperor of his meager talents at that time had any right. But the last years of his reign did not really belong to him, but to his general Constantius, and the amazing woman who Constantius finally married, the emperor's half-sister Galla Placidia. It has been noted that the two sons of Theodosius the Great, Honorius and Arcadius, inherited none of their father's abilities in any respect. This benefit fell to their half-sister born in about 390, daughter of Theodosius and his second wife Galla, neither of whom she would have had much recollection, since her mother died when she was about four, and Theodosius departed soon after for his final campaign in the West. As a consequence, she was placed in the care of Stilicho's household and raised by his wife Serena, her cousin. She was, therefore, with Serena in Rome at the time of Alaric's first siege rather than at court in Ravenna. For some unexplained reason, Serena became a victim of politics with the senate, who decreed her death, with which it appears Placidia concurred. There is a suggestion that Serena was pressing Placidia to marry her son Eucherius, but if so it seems an unreasonable excuse for condemning her foster-mother to death.

Thus it was that she was still at Rome during the third siege and the sack, and became a royal hostage of Alaric, treated with all due respect but a prisoner for ransom nonetheless. After the Visigothic king's death his brother-in-law Athaulf was proclaimed king in his place. Athaulf was a curious figure; at first, unlike Alaric, determined to destroy everything Rome stood for, but by turns coming to the exact opposite view and declaring that he wanted to be known to posterity as the man who restored the empire to its former splendor. This transformation was evidently taking place at this point in time because the restitution of Placidia was less willingly offered, and for the very good reason that captor and hostage were falling in love. Meanwhile, there was another suitor for her hand.

Constantius was a native of Illyricum, born at Naissus (Nis). He had served in many campaigns under Theodosius the Great and had come into his own when Honorius most needed a strong arm to rest on. He is described as having a sulky look, with a broad head set on a thick neck, with large, full eyes that darted about as he scowled—the

complete tyrant in appearance, perhaps not unlike Mark Antony. Appearances apart, he was a polite man, and good company at suppertime. And for the decade after Stilicho's death Constantius was the dominant Roman military leader as his rapid defeats of Gerontius and Constantine III in 411 proved. After these victories Honorius allowed him to keep the spoils, which provided sufficient funds for him to celebrate an ovation and, more importantly, secure the release from Athaulf of Placidia, with whom he was madly in love. However, this was no simple matter because the Visigoths had decided to leave Italy, and Placidia went with them into Galliae. Athaulf's intended destination of Moguntiacum seems to have been suggested to him by the pitiable ex-Augustus Attalus, who was still making his nomadic home with the Visigoths. At Moguntiacum, Jovinus, yet another usurper, had claimed the purple—a situation, Attalus suggested, that offered interesting opportunities for the Visigoths.

Of noble Gallic birth, Jovinus had seized power at Moguntiacum with the help of Goar, an Alan chieftain and a Burgundian called Guntiar (Guntiarus). Additionally, he enjoyed the substantial support of the somewhat bewildered and bedraggled remnants of provincial aristocracy, as his fine-quality coinage struck at Lugdunum, Treveri and Arelate indicates. Early in 412 Athaulf began negotiations with Jovinus, but these were broken off when the Goth Sarus rode into camp with a handful of compatriots to offer his services to Jovinus, unaware that he was falling right into the hands of his arch-enemy. Sarus had defected from Honorius in disgust that one of his faithful servants had been murdered at the imperial court and the emperor had refused to make restitution. But in offering his support to Jovinus, he had ridden to his death.

Athaulf's troops surrounded Sarus's small force, and all were overwhelmed and slain. Claiming that he had rid Jovinus of a nuisance, Athaulf wanted a share of power, but Jovinus insulted him by elevating his own brother Sebastianus to co-Augustus. At the start of 413 Athaulf offered Honorius the heads of the usurpers in return for an honorable peace with the Visigoths, and the offer was accepted. Athaulf did not delay, and shortly after Jovinus arrived bound and in company with the head of his brother. That of Jovinus was also struck off and—puzzlingly—the heads were sent to Carthage to be displayed outside the gate alongside those of Constantine III, his son Julianus, and Heraclianus.

As a footnote, Maximus—whom Gerontius had set up in Hispaniae

in opposition to Constantine III—was deposed in 411 and allowed to retire, but suffered execution in 422, after being accused of fomenting another rebellion. As for Guntarius and his Burgundi, Constantius granted them land on the west bank of the Rhine in 413 and gave them the status of *foederati*. In this capacity, they later migrated into the Rhodanus valley and, by the 450s, held Lugdunum as their capital.

Galla Placidia's Marriages

Unfortunately for Constantius, negotiations with Athaulf had not resulted in Placidia's return. He pressed for her restitution, and Athaulf demanded concessions of land, money, and corn in ever-greater amounts. As the Visigoths moved to the south they made a surprise attack on Massilia (Marseilles), but were repulsed by the garrison commanded by a certain Bonifacius, after which they went to Narbo. And there, in January 414, Athaulf and Galla Placidia were wed. Honorius had dismissed Athaulf's many requests to marry his sister, and the Visigoth's sense of Teutonic honor may explain why, after a love affair of four years, he had delayed. But toward the end of 413, Honorius relented, we are told, because he conceded the good advice of a general called Candidianus. Placidia took her Christian vows as a Roman matron befitting her imperial status; Athaulf was garbed not as a German chieftain but in the raiment of a Roman senator. Amid the splendor of the nuptials, presided over by the Arian bishop Sigesarius, something unique had taken place—the union of barbarous Gothia with civilized Rome, another of the signal events that beckoned the dawning medieval era.

Shortly after the wedding of his beloved to another, Constantius received in Arelate an embassy seeking tax concessions headed by the young Gallic noble Avitus, who will be of some consequence in future affairs. But the distractions of administration did not deter Constantius from his hatred of Athaulf. Despite the marriage alliance to the imperial family, he refused to stop his attacks on the Visigoths, and he used every method to drive them from Narbonensis and into Hispaniae, now much despoiled by the Vandals and Suevi. They settled for a while at Barcino (Barcelona), where a servant who bore him some ancient grudge assassinated Athaulf in 415. His brother Valia honored the dying Athaulf's last wish and restored Placidia to the Romans in return for the right to settle on land spanning southern Aquitania and the western half of Narbonensis Primus. A treaty was finally concluded in 418, and Tolosa (Toulouse) became the Visigothic capital under nominal imperial authority. Once again, the Visigoths were *foederati*, and combined armies of Goths and Romans protected Galliae and northeastern Hispaniae from Vandal raids.

There was one major setback to the alliance in 420, when the Vandal king Gunderic defeated a Romano-Gothic army and became ruler of a unified Vandal-Alani kingdom centered on Baetica. This allowed him to take control of key ports and, more importantly, the

Roman galleys moored there. A vast pirate fleet that assiduously raided the Balears, Corsica, Sardinia, and coastal cities now replaced Roman naval power, which for so many centuries had dominated the Mediterranean, Roman's *Mare Internum*. Their booty helped shore up the fledgling Vandal kingdom and fueled a desire for further conquest. In 428 Gunderic's successor and half-brother, the shrewd and militarily outstanding Gaiseric (or Genseric), led all eighty thousand of his people across the narrow strait to begin an assault on Mauretania.

Constantius met his bride-to-be—the betrothal was commanded by Honorius—at the foot of the Alps to escort her to Ravenna. However, a modest period of mourning was allowed her, during which time Constantius paid his suit and she rejected it. But Placidia really had no choice, and finally agreed to be married in 417. Not surprisingly, Constantius ensured that the celebrations were even more sumptuous than those of Athaulf; the fame of their spectacle had radiated from Narbo to every part of the empire. Within two years Placidia bore Constantius a daughter, Justa Grata Honoria, followed by a son, Valentinian.

The years following the wedding were uneventful with King Walia guarding the Gallic frontier against the Vandals, and the high point was a triumph celebrated by Honorius, in accordance with tradition, at Rome. The occasion was less than glorious, however. Poor itinerant ex-Augustus Attalus, having witnessed Placidia's first marriage, had somehow wandered up into Galliae, and been proclaimed emperor again in 414, but was soon deposed and removed by the Visigoths to Hispaniae. From Spain he had taken ship and been captured by one of Honorius's *quinqueremes* and taken to Rome. A poor excuse, but the only triumph Honorius was likely to enjoy. In the course of the procession, Attalus was forced to kneel before the emperor, who ordered the thumb and forefinger from his right hand to be amputated, and his exile to the Lipari Islands, where he was left to die.

Galla Placidia felt her position at court was insufficiently elevated and kept badgering Honorius to raise her husband to be his colleague, and reluctantly the emperor gave in. On February 8, 421, Constantius became Constantius III, co-Augustus with Honorius, and Placidia became styled Augusta. In keeping with the custom, statues of Constantius were sent to Constantinople for erection in the Eastern capital. However, news of the unilateral addition to the Augusti did

not sit well with Theodosius II—or rather with his sister Pulcheria, who effectively ruled in his name. The statues were returned and Theodosius refused to recognize Constantius, who in consequence began somewhat petulant preparations for a war against the Eastern empire. However, conflict was avoided because Constantius developed pleurisy and, depressed by the curtailment of his freedom through the tedious court ceremonial he was obliged to observe, he continued to sicken and died on the second day of September 421.

Widowed for a second time, Placidia now found herself in a difficult position, because her half-brother Honorius, who had always held her in an affection that bordered on the incestuous, finally gave vent to his repressed feelings. He started to kiss her at public functions in a manner that was obviously more than brotherly. Honorius wavered between fondness and mistrust, was jealous of her ministers and close associates, and his moods affected the court adversely. Fights between his servants and those of the Augusta became commonplace, even spilling out into the streets. Placidia quarreled with Honorius, and the conflict became so bitter that in the spring of 423, she withdrew to the court of her nephew Theodosius in Constantinople, taking her two children with her. Had she been able to command her brother's behavior and so stayed in Ravenna, Placidia would have been able to avoid what happened when Honorius, aged thirty-nine suddenly died of "dropsy" (probably a disease of the lungs) on August 26, 423. Into the imperial vacuum stepped the *primicerius notariorum* (chief of the notaries), a man called Joannes—another usurper.

How an obscure clerk became the emperor in Ravenna is hard to understand, and the ancient histories have little to offer in the way of explanation. The office of *primicerius notariorum*—a chief clerk and diarist—was a useful one, but hardly at the forefront of the imperial bureaucratic hierarchy. The only explanation that fits the politics of the period is that Honorius's *Magister Militum* Castinus supported the pretension of Joannes, predictably because he expected to enjoy the real power without the pain that any experienced general knew attended imperial failure; much as had Arbogast supported Eugenius.

As befitted his position while a *privatus*, Joannes was an intelligent man, and the historian Procopius praised his mild manner and also his general abilities as an administrator. However, his eighteen-month reign was beset by all the ills that a pretender to the throne might be expected to attract. Theodosius II refused him any sort of recognition, a revolt against him in Narbonensis resulted in the praetorian prefect being slain in Arelate, and *Comes* Bonifacius (he who had defended Massilia so bravely against Alaric), now governing Africa, typically cut off the grain supply.

It might have been hoped that Theodosius would not welcome Galla Placidia and the infant Valentinian, son of Constantius III from whom the Eastern emperor had also withheld recognition, but this turned out not to be the case. When Theodosius elevated Valentinian to the rank of Caesar, it was clear that war could not be far away. And in pursuance of an offensive policy, Joannes bequeathed one great benefit to the Western empire, the promotion of a young man called Aëtius. The son of a mixed marriage of an Italian mother and Gaudentius, a Visigoth in the service of the empire who had risen to become *Comes Africae*, Aëtius had been given in his youth first as a hostage to Alaric, who taught him the military arts, and then to the Hunnish king Rugila. It was from this last acquaintance that Joannes hoped to benefit, and sent Aëtius on an embassy to the Huns to seek military help in the coming war with Constantinople. In this he was successful, receiving a detachment of some sixty thousand Huns to come to Joannes' aid. However, the Eastern empire reacted too quickly for Aëtius to save his master.

Theodosius accompanied the army sent to dethrone the usurper as far as Thessalonica, where he was detained by an illness. Galla Placidia and the five-year-old Valentinian continued on under the

overall protection of the *magister militum*, the Alan Ardaburius and his son Flavius Aspar (a man who was to rise to great power in the East), and the specific guardianship of Candidianus, the general who had ten years before persuaded Honorius to let Placidia marry Athaulf. Candidianus scored some useful victories in the northeast of Italy, which offset the disaster that befell Ardaburius. He, too, had had successful skirmishes in Dalmatia, but while sailing to Aquileia his ship was blown off course and landed on the marshy coast among the enemy, close to Ravenna. Taken in chains before Joannes, he contrived to convince the usurper of his treachery to Placidia's cause, and his life was spared. The Byzantine force, now under Aspar's command, hastened to the marshes and dykes surrounding Ravenna and managed to ford the lagoon and take the city's defenses by surprise early in 425.

With hardly any casualties, Ravenna was taken, Joannes captured and wily Ardaburius freed. The later historian Socrates recounts how the Byzantines were guided through the watery maze by an angel, but the contemporary Philostorgius attributes the defeat of Joannes to the treachery of his supporters, who had been suborned by Ardaburius. We are also told that Joannes had weakened his forces by sending detachments to Africa to oust Bonifacius. Joannes was taken to Aquileia, where Placidia and her children were waiting. He was then dragged into the circus, where his right hand was cut off. Then, in a mockery of a triumph, he was led around the city riding on an ass to the jeers of the mob, before being executed. To punish Ravenna for supporting a pretender, the city was sacked for three days, which loss proved Rome's gift as it regained the status of capital. Valentinian III—now six—was taken there to be crowned with the diadem and become co-Augustus with Theodosius.

Only three days after Joannes' death, Aëtius belatedly returned at the head of his army of Huns. This sudden and frightening influx of Rome's occasional ally but usually deadliest foe forced Aspar to rally his troops, fresh from their pillaging of Ravenna, and take the field. But the initial skirmishes were hollow—neither side was keen to spill blood. The Huns were rattling their swords in order to raise the price of their quietly going home, and this was agreed between the Augusta Placidia and Aëtius. In receipt of a handsome sum of gold, the Huns retired peacefully, and Placidia gave Aëtius the title of *Comes per Italy*, from which position he became her chief adviser.

Theodosius II

Flavius Theodosius

[Co-Augustus, East 402; Augustus, East May 408 to July 28, 450]

Theodosius, son of Arcadius and Aelia Eudoxia, was born in April 401. He was the fourth child but the first boy, so his arrival was received with great joy, both by his family and by the populace of Constantinople. He was baptized and crowned Augustus in January of the following year. When his father died in 408, the seven-year-old was fortunate in his praetorian prefect, Anthemius. This able and high-principled man had dominated the last years of Arcadius's reign, in stark and welcome contrast to the feckless emperor's previous counselors. Now he became regent to young Theodosius, and was instrumental in the reconciliation between East and West (even to sharing a consulship with Stilicho in 405).

Despite this apparent accord, the death of Stilicho made it more readily possible for Anthemius to cement relations between Constantinople and Ravenna, which remained cordial until the elevation of Constantius III in February 421. Anthemius put to good use the continual influx of Germanic tribes by using them to counter the barely civilized Isaurian tribes that had been plaguing southern Anatolia since 403. And he was the real architect in 413 of the great new land walls to protect Constantinople, known as the Theodosian Walls, much of which still stand today. For unknown reasons, Anthemius did not last beyond 414, at which point Theodosius became dominated by his sister, Aelia Pulcheria, only two years his senior but already named Augusta, and the real power behind the throne.

Weak and easily led, Theodosius was developing in a manner that suggested he would not be much of an improvement on his father. However, he possessed the charm Arcadius had lacked, was an earnest student in Latin and Greek classics, mathematics, natural sciences, and in art. In fact he became such an adept at illuminating manuscripts that he was given the Greek nickname *Kalligraphos*. While as a boy he was surrounded by the paraphernalia of religion, it is doubtful that he became as involved as Pulcheria, who was exactly devout and pious, and demanding in the same way with her two other sisters, Arcadia and Marina. In the days of their mother Eudoxia, the palace had resembled the bordello that John Chrysostom had railed against, now it rang to the chants of monks and felt more like a cloister. Quietly secluded amid this ecclesiastical threnody, Theodosius was

content to pursue his studies and leave matters of state to Pulcheria. In 420 he decided to take a wife, and asked his sister to help him find one. She settled on a beautiful young Greek girl named Athenaïs; a pagan. This problem was overcome by having her baptized, with a change of name to Aelia Eudocia, and the couple were married on June 7, 421.

In the following year she gave Theodosius a daughter, who he named Licinia Eudoxia; to avoid confusion between the two similar names, it is easiest to refer to her mother by her Greek name, Athenaïs. In his delight at her birth, Theodosius awarded his wife Athenaïs the title of Augusta in 423. This was a move not calculated to put Pulcheria in a good mood, and she soon conceived a jealousy of her sister-in-law similar to that Julia Mamaea had for her daughter-in-law in 227, when Sallustia began to dominate Severus Alexander. In the same summer, the empire's third Augusta arrived at court, Galla Placidia, with her children Justa Grata Honoria and Valentinian, seeking refuge from her half-brother Honorius's unwelcome advances. The events resulting from the death of Honorius in August of the same year demanded Pulcheria's full attention, and her feelings against her sister-in-law Athenaïs were put on hold as she organized the mobilization of the Byzantine army that would defeat the usurper Joannes.

It was fortunate for Theodosius that the empire's relations with the Sassanians remained cordial, for it relieved him of fighting with enemies on two fronts. He had received the recognition of King Isdigerdes at his accession and the Persian court's moderate attitudes toward Christianity assured peace between the empires until the king's death in 421. On the accession of his son, Vararanes V, hostilities broke out anew. The new king allegedly began a persecution of Christians, and some Roman citizens were harassed. Vararanes launched a campaign against Rome's eastern frontier, but was very quickly defeated by several able generals, including the redoubtable Ardaburius of Ravenna fame. The outcome was a treaty called the One-Hundred-Year Peace. Each empire's borders were to be respected, and kept largely demilitarized. There were several infractions, including one in 440–41 when Isdigerdes II came to the Sassanian throne, but otherwise the treaty held for the rest of the fifth century.

At home, the peace was not so well kept between Pulcheria and Athenaïs, each trying to outdo the other in the religious sphere. The marriage of Licinia Eudoxia to Valentinian III in 437 only reinforced

the struggle. Years before, Athenais had made a vow that if her daughter did marry Valentinian she would make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem in thanksgiving. When she returned in 439 the important relics she brought to the capital—including the original chains with which Herod had bound St. Peter—gained her enormous prestige, putting in the shade Pulcheria's return of the saintly John Chrysostom's relics to Constantinople. Athenais' fall from favor with Theodosius was engineered by eunuchs in Pulcheria's camp, who fabricated a charge of adultery with the *Magister Officiorum* Paulinus, himself a confidant of the emperor. Protesting her innocence, Athenais took herself away from the court and, after a pause of three years, returned to Jerusalem in 443, where she remained until her death in 460. Paulinus was exiled to Caesarea in Cappadocia, and executed in 440.

The Theodosian Law

Theodosius's greatest legacy was the result of a commission set up in March 429. With the emperor's participation, it was to publish the first great pandect of Roman law. In the age since Diocletian, when the last comprehensive law code had been issued, both Eastern and Western emperors had published a large number of general constitutions. Many were no longer relevant to modern-day concerns, and many more were unworkable or contradictory. There was the additional problem of harmonizing the codes of the East and the West, and creating a process by which each half of the empire could recognize and respect one another's laws.

A commission of nine scholars compiled all the legislation enacted in both the East and the West since the time of Constantine the Great. Theodosius seemed less interested in ridding the legal system of contradictions—although many were reconciled—than he was in providing a truly comprehensive set of laws. After six years, a first edition was completed in 435, but not published. A second commission improved the language and created a system by which the code could be further emended and enlarged as necessary in the future. The *Codex Theodosianus* was finally promulgated on February 15, 438 jointly in the senates of Rome and Constantinople (Rome still the center of Western jurisprudence). The code had enormous influence, both in itself and in future legal history. Together with the work of those great third-century jurists Ulpian, Papinian, and Julius Paulus, it became the basis for Justinian's much more ambitious judicial reforms in the following century. It is also possible to trace considerable portions of King Alaric II's *Lex Romana Visigothorum* of 507 to the *Codex Theodosianus*, which in turn influenced medieval European law for centuries.

Attila and the Huns

By the turn of the fifth century, the Huns had settled east of the Danube, particularly along the plains of what is now Hungary. From here, they had caused the empire only occasional problems and had even consented to serve under Roman arms when it suited them. What misery the Huns inflicted on the other barbarians along the empire's edge was of little consequence, other than being the principal cause of the massed barbarian migrations of 407. On the borders of the Eastern empire, the Huns were appeased by tribute payments, as the Goths had been before them. Their king Roua received an annual payment of some three hundred and fifty pounds of gold, and this helped to maintain an uneasy peace. However, the situation changed dramatically in 434, when Roua died and was succeeded by the two sons of his brother Mundzuk, named Bleda and Attila. After the older brother's death some years later, Attila was for nineteen years to become the terror of all the Christian world.

Almost sixty years earlier, Ammianus had described the Huns as:

...a race savage beyond all parallel...They are certainly in the shape of men, however uncouth, and are so hardy that they neither require fire nor well flavored food, but live on the roots of such herbs as they get in the fields, or on the half-raw flesh of any animal, which they merely warm rapidly by placing it between their own thighs and the backs of their horses.

Attila was clearly a man of the same mold, for he is described in contemporary sources—no proven images of him exist—as being short, with small, beady eyes, a snub-nose, swarthy like his race, and with a head too large for his body, his chin adorned with a straggly beard. Surprisingly for the destruction he caused, Attila was no great general—the only pitched battle he fought against disciplined troops, he lost. His tactics were those of a bully, and given a bloody nose, he ran off. However, that day was some time in the future. Attacks against the Eastern empire began in 441, and for six years skirmishes along the Danube and in Pannoniae were an irritant, but gave Constantinople little cause for immediate alarm as long as the Huns continued to receive the agreed annual tribute. But in 447 the situation changed dramatically. By this time Bleda had died (no contemporary sources suggest that he was murdered by his brother, a popularly held belief) and Attila was in sole command of the Hunnish army. When he demanded double the tribute, seven hundred pounds of gold each year, Theodosius either flatly refused, or at least dithered on the decision.

In the eight years since his crowning, Attila had raided far across northern Europe to the shores of the *Oceanus Germanicus* (North Sea). But in the year of refusal he was back on the Danube, and his forces stormed across the river. Many cities were razed, including Philippopolis, Sirmium, Naissus, and Serdica. The cruelties Attila inflicted in this campaign earned him the title “Scourge of God” by the Christian communities so afflicted. He then split his army in two. One arm swept southward into Thessalia, the other advanced on Constantinople. Between them they destroyed everything between the Adriatic and the Aegean, as far south as Thermopylae, and as far east as the Hellespont, where the Huns inflicted a defeat on Roman forces at Callipolis (Gallipoli). Only the capital’s massive new walls completed by Theodosius in the nick of time saved the empire from total disaster. That and the old enemy of the barbarian ravager—the land laid so much to waste could no longer support the horde, and Attila’s Huns drifted back toward the Danube, and negotiations for peace commenced. The slaughter in Naissus had been so terrible that the Roman ambassadors were unable to enter its ruins for the mass of human bones and an all-pervading stink of death. Attila’s peace terms trebled the annual tribute and demanded full payment of arrears, and the Romans had no choice but to comply, at a dreadful cost to the people in Theodosius’s dominions.

With Athenaïs far away in Jerusalem and Pulcheria no longer the emperor’s confidante, there was no one close to Theodosius who might have raised in him some spirit to resist. Under the obviously astute “diplomacy” of Attila, the empire’s wealth was being drained away, and only Theodosius’s death brought a halt to this state of affairs. Theodosius had one great love other than scholarly pursuits and illumination, and that was hunting. And it was while he was out on July 28, 450 that a fall from his horse killed him; he was in his forty-ninth year. He and Athenaïs had produced no male heir, so it was down to Pulcheria to direct the succession, which she did by contracting a marriage with a Thracian ex-soldier and senator called Marcianus (Marcian), and placing him on the throne beside her.

Marcian’s story is told at the start of chapter fourteen, but he undertook one important task that bears on events in the West—he refused to pay Attila any further tribute. Was this bravery, or a calculated gamble? Marcian’s spies had informed him that Attila’s plans for a vast operation against the Western empire were so far advanced that he would be unwilling to delay them for a punitive

attack on Constantinople, which in any case would only have the unsatisfactory outcome of the raid of 447. Rejoicing broke out some days later when news arrived that the Huns were on the march... toward the Western empire.

[33. Link to: Pawns in the Power Game](#)

[Family Tree: House of Valentinian & Theodosian Dynasty](#)

Valentinian III

Placidius Valentinianus

[Caesar c.October 423; co-Augustus, West 424 to March 15, 455]

Born in 419, Valentinian was granted the title *nobilissimus* by his uncle Honorius, an indication that he might be considered the emperor's heir. As we have seen, Theodosius in the East recognized neither his father Constantius's elevation nor initially Valentinian's legitimacy in the purple. This changed when Galla Placidia exiled herself to Constantinople with Valentinian and his sister Justa Grata Honoria. Theodosius, then in his twenty-fourth year, went so far as to betroth his baby daughter, Licinia Eudoxia, to his young nephew in 424, before the Byzantine army moved to unseat the usurper Joannes. Twelve years after his betrothal, Valentinian returned to Constantinople in 437 to marry Eudoxia. Barely aged seven when he was crowned in Rome, his mother Placidia utterly dominated his reign, and she was to precede him to the grave by only five years. The other figure who held the reins of power was Aëtius. Ineffectual, spoiled, devoted to religion and astrology in equal measure, Valentinian III was not fitted to rule, and showed neither the aptitude nor inclination to do so. The only effective measure he seems to have taken was to grant greater ecclesiastical power to the bishop of Rome, especially Pope Leo I the Great (440–61). The story of his reign, then, is really that of the Augusta Galla Placidia.

The two great calamities of Placidia's reign were the loss of Africa to the Vandals, and the invasion of the Huns under the terrible Attila. The first disaster may well be blamed on certain steps taken by Placidia that led to the mutual enmity of her two great counselors, Bonifacius and Aëtius. Bonifacius had driven Alaric from the walls of Massilia in 412, wounding the Visigothic king by his own spear, it is said. His next appearance in history is in 422 quarreling with Castinus, Honorius's *magister militum*, who refused him a high position in a planned campaign against the Vandals in Spain. Irritated, Bonifacius evidently left and made his way to Africa, which by this time was almost a no-man's land. Here, he managed to stamp his authority on the provinces, in spite of only holding the rank of *tribunus militum*. However, his services to the Theodosian house in withholding grain from Joannes earned him Placidia's affection, and she appears to have confirmed his position and made him *Comes Africae* during a visit he made to pay her court in Ravenna.

As the master of Italy, Aëtius had wanted this office as well, for his

father had once been *Comes Africae*, but he hid his dissatisfaction behind a mask of friendliness toward his rival. Then he intrigued. Placidia listened to his counsel, that Bonifacius would develop into another Gildo, and seize the African provinces as his own kingdom. To prove Bonifacius's treachery, she should write and, without specifying a reason, summon him to Ravenna. Aëtius argued that Bonifacius would refuse her order, which would prove his malign intent. Aëtius then wrote to his "good friend" Bonifacius to warn him that the Augusta was plotting against him, and he would know this to be true when he received a letter from her summoning him to Ravenna for no stated reason. Like Placidia, Bonifacius accepted this advice, and when the letter arrived, made no move, confirming the Augusta's worst fears. She had him declared a public enemy in 427.

Africa was no longer well supplied with troops, and in desperation Bonifacius made a compact with Gaiseric, king of the Vandals still battling the Visigoths and Suevi for mastery of Spain. Late in 428, Gaiseric brought eighty thousand Vandals across the narrow strait and began advancing through the Mauretanian provinces toward Numidia and Africa Proconsularis. Meanwhile, friends of Bonifacius in Rome had uncovered the treachery of Aëtius and went to Carthage to lay the facts before him. When Placidia was also informed, she relented and forgave Bonifacius, but felt unable to break with Aëtius, who was warring against the Franks. Now Bonifacius had to persuade the Vandals to quit Mauretania, but Gaiseric scorned him, and continued his advance along the North African coast. In early skirmishes, Bonifacius won some victories, but it was clear he could not hold on for long, and Placidia had no reinforcements to send. At this desperate point Theodosius II in Constantinople showed himself to be a friend of the West again by dispatching a Byzantine naval force under Aspar, son of Ardaburius and the young general who had triumphed over Joannes at Ravenna. Sadly, it was not enough, and Bonifacius was defeated in a great battle in 431, and compelled to flee with his forces to Italy, leaving Mauretania and Numidia in Vandal hands.

On his victorious return from the Frankish campaign, Aëtius dashed to confront his rival, and in the ensuing battle, Aëtius was technically defeated, but challenged Bonifacius to single combat to determine the outcome. In this somewhat Teutonic conflict, Bonifacius received a mortal wound of which he died three months later, in 433. Still furious with him over his conniving, Placidia did not immediately restore Aëtius to his full powers, but the Augusta could hardly keep

her most skilled general on the shelf, and he was soon back in the field battling in Galliae against Visigoths, Burgundi and Franks. There were many successes, but none sufficient to more than maintain a semblance of imperial control over the eastern region of the former Gallic provinces. Across the Mediterranean, Gaiseric had remained out of Africa Proconsularis in return for *foederati* status, and so grain for bread in Rome—albeit in reduced quantities—still came, and some nominal imperial presence was maintained at Carthage. But at his capital in Hippo Regius (Annaba), Gaiseric had no intention of abiding by this agreement, and in 439 he attacked Proconsularis. The loss of Carthage was a shock to the Romans, but their hands were full elsewhere.

Attila in the West

By now Attila's eye was turning to the dominions of Valentinian III, with whom he had previously remained on reasonable, if somewhat lordly terms. If he needed a pretext for invasion—which is hardly believable—it came in the form of a particularly Roman scandal. In 449 Valentinian's sister Honoria was caught in an affair with her steward, who was promptly executed. She was kept in solitary confinement, but in her anger she smuggled out a ring to Attila suggesting he intervene as her champion. Attila described this as an imperial marriage proposal and demanded half the Western empire as her dowry. The preposterous claim was firmly denied by Placidia and Aëtius, and they prepared for the inevitable war. Aëtius needed the Visigoths as allies, but after the peace of 419–29, there had been ten years of war, the Visigothic king Theodoric I trying to take Narbonensis and Aëtius retaliating by attacking what had been Aquitania Secunda, now Gothia. After 439 there had been peace but little friendship between the courts of Ravenna and Tolosa. Nevertheless, Aëtius was able to persuade Theodoric of their common cause, and to this alliance he added the Salian Franks, descendants of those Salii that Constantius I had settled on the island of the Batavians at the end of the third century. Their neighbors, the Ripurarian Franks, however, sided with Attila.

Attila counted among his warriors countless of the German tribes, including the Saxons, who were already raiding defenseless Britain. In the spring of 451 this vast host, numbered by historical sources—undoubtedly exaggerating—as between five hundred thousand and seven hundred thousand, crossed the Rhine in an armada of rough-hewn boats and swept south, sacking first Colonia Agrippina, then in succession Moguntiacum, Argentorate, Remi (formerly Durocortorum), and were on the verge of taking Cenabum Aureliani (Orléans) when Aëtius met them in June, in what was perhaps the greatest single engagement western Europe was to witness before 1914. The battle of the Catalaunian Plain near Durocatalauni (Châlons-sur-Marne) resulted in Attila suffering his first and only reversal and, according to contemporary accounts, left more than two hundred thousand dead, among them King Theodoric, who had been unhorsed and trampled to death. Military strategists have since criticized Aëtius for allowing Attila to retreat across the Rhine, but the Romans had also taken massive losses and were in no position to pursue the enemy. Perhaps, also, Aëtius felt a continued threat from the Huns would hold his

Gallic alliance together.

The architect of the Western empire's security, fraught and doubtful as it had been, and in reality a crumbling away of provinces, did not witness the success of her general Aëtius, for Galla Placidia, approaching her sixtieth year, died in Rome on November 27, 450. The imperial court had been in Rome for twenty-five years, but her body was returned in state to her beloved Ravenna. She was, therefore, also spared the horrors to come. When he returned in 452, Attila wreaked a terrible revenge on Italy. Descending the Frigidus, the Huns fell on Aquileia and besieged the city. The citizens held out for three months before the Huns breached the walls, slaughtered everyone and torched the buildings. With dreadful rapidity other major cities followed suit—Concordia, Altinum (Altino), Patavium (Padua)—while others opened their gates and were saved from burning but not from pillage, and the citizens were taken into slavery.

At Mediolanum, the Hunnish king set up his court, and prepared to take the war south to Rome. Aëtius, no longer able to call on Gallic and Gothic allies, was no match for the Huns. But Rome and Italy were saved by the intervention of Pope Leo I, already raised high by Valentinian, who went to meet Attila where the River Mincio meets the Padus (Po). Here, by means we can only guess at, Leo convinced the Hun to turn back. The Huns migrated into the reaches of the Danube and fell into squabbles between themselves and concentrations of Ostrogoths. Attila was contemplating a further attack against Constantinople, when he died in his sleep in 453, and Christian Europe gave a great collective sigh of relief.

In the following year the Ostrogoths won a great victory over the demoralized Huns, after which the most of the nation drifted away to regions around the Mare Caspium (Caspian Sea), having in its time brought Europe to its knees. Those that remained took service in the Eastern Roman army as mercenary auxiliaries and were to have a part to play in later events (see chapter seventeen, Belisarius in Africa). There is an interesting footnote to the story of Attila's retreat from Italy in 452. Tradition asserts that the thousands who fled from the wrath of the Huns hid out among the reeds, marshes and lagoons of the northwestern coast of the Adriatic above Ravenna, and there built a village on stilts. The settlement grew and became named after the region, Venetia, and developed into the city we know today as Venice. Unlike the rest of Italy, Venice retained its independence under a form of republican government. Over the centuries it prospered and grew

into the great trading city-nation that, in 1204, brought the Byzantine empire and Constantinople in particular to its knees.

In all these events, the emperor had played little part, but Valentinian had a sting in his tail. His position relative to powerful Aëtius is reminiscent to that of his uncle Honorius to Stilicho forty-six years before. In the palace in Rome, where Valentinian had mostly resided during the Hunnish invasion, wily eunuchs began to poison his vacant mind against Aëtius, who was promised in marriage to the emperor's youngest daughter, Galla Placidia the Younger. Since Valentinian had no son, the marriage would have placed Aëtius in line for the succession. The whisperings of chamberlains had their effect, so much so in fact that Valentinian was driven himself to strike the killing blow with his own dagger. Asking a palace official after the murder whether he had performed a good deed or not, the courtier replied: "I am scarcely able to say. One thing, however, I do know, that you have chopped off your right hand with your left." And so it was. In the middle of March 455, while watching some athletes training in the small part of the Campus Martius left unbuilt, two henchmen of Aëtius sprang out from behind a bush and stabbed the emperor to death. It is a reflection of how low Valentinian had fallen in people's esteem that his murder was not avenged. With Theodosius II in his grave five years, his sister Pulcheria for three, and now Valentinian III gone, the dynasty of Theodosius the Great had ended, although not quite the house, for Galla Placidia the Younger would marry another emperor, Olybrius.

FALL OF THE WEST

[AD 455–476]

Petronius Maximus

Flavius Anicius Petronius Maximus

[Augustus West March 17, 455 to May 31, 455]

After Valentinian III's murder, the choice of the army and the people fell on Petronius Maximus, quite simply because he was the highest-ranking senator in Rome and promised to make a good emperor. Apart—possibly—from that it was said he was the grandson of the usurping emperor Magnus Maximus, his *curriculum vitae* was exemplary. He was born in about 397 and seems to have embarked on a senatorial career by about 411 as a praetor, a purely honorary office by this time that entailed paying for races in the Circus. At the age of eighteen he was admitted to the imperial council in the junior post of *tribunus et notarius*. This was followed by a series of high-level imperial appointments: *comes sacrarum largitionum*; *praefectus urbi* (held twice); *praefectus praetorio Italiae* (also held twice). In 433 he became a consul for the first of two times. At the age of about fifty he attained the rank of Patrician.

By the fifth century, the term “patrician” meant something very different to its Republican usage, when it referred to the first families of Rome. The patriciate had largely vanished by the time of Augustus, and any remaining members fell to the intrigues of Nero's *delatores*. Constantine the Great revived the title in the fourth century, but only as a personal honorific and not a hereditary dignity. In this way, Aëtius wore this rare distinction for the last twenty years of his life, and to the common folk the title Patrician came to be associated with the head of government and real power in the state, the first minister.

With a statue raised in his name in the Forum of Trajan by none less than Honorius himself, Petronius Maximus was clearly the man for the job. And yet his reign lasted for only two and a half months and as a consequence of his demands on Valentinian's widow (as some later accounts claimed) was responsible for yet another sack of poor war-torn Rome.

His downfall can be attributed to two primary causes: the first his own surprising ineptitude that lost him the affection of the senate and people, and his attempts to ally himself by marriage to Valentinian's

widow to the Theodosian house. His first mistake was not to prosecute Valentinian's two murderers, Optila and Traustila, and worse, to receive them into the circle of his friends. Whatever his reasons were for this, his subjects suspiciously detected his hand in the assassination—and it would be hard to blame them. Further execration resulted from the emperor's muddle of harshness mixed with feebleness. But Rome was even more appalled by Maximus's demands that Valentinian's widow, the beautiful Licinia Eudoxia, marry him. That she was still in widows' weeds and would be for many months, and that at thirty-three she did not want to marry a sexagenarian, counted for nothing. With her aunt Pulcheria dead, there was no one of her family left to save her, so she adopted the tactic that her sister-in-law Justa Grata Honoria had employed, and called on barbarians to save her; not the Huns, however, this time the appeal was to Gaiseric.

The Vandal king may well have been pleased to be given a plausible excuse to raid Rome, but neither Alaric nor Attila had ever bothered with pretexts for their aggression and nothing Gaiseric had done to date indicated that he was any different. Only two chronicles mention the traditional story of Eudoxia's plight, and one—John of Antioch—cites it as little more than a popular legend. While it is a great deal less romantic, it is far more probable that Eudoxia needed no barbarian rescue from the new emperor, and that Gaiseric had been planning on the final subjugation of Rome from the moment he captured Carthage. Whether or not he ever received Eudoxia's cry, his fleet set sail from Carthage in May and sailed to Ostia. Maximus might at this dire moment have saved his reputation through the organization of a vigorous defense of the city, but he did the opposite. Cowering in the palace and preparing to flee north, he issued a proclamation that anyone who wished was free to leave Rome.

He need not have bothered. The senators and wealthy had already packed up and fled. But the common people had nowhere else to go, and in their fear and fury, rose up with the garrison soldiers on May 31—only two days before Gaiseric's sails hove to and three days before the Vandals were at the city gates— and tore Petronius Maximus limb from limb, throwing the dismembered parts of his body into the Tiber.

Rome was, to a degree, once again saved by the good offices of the venerable Pope Leo I, who went out to meet Gaiseric to see if he could repeat the charms that had turned Attila. The Vandal king was persuaded to the extent that he promised there would be no damage

to buildings and no deaths. What he wanted was booty, and for fourteen days the city was subjected to “a leisurely and unhindered” extraction of its wealth. Although its fabric was untouched, the roof covering of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus was half stripped. The Vandals probably desisted when they realized that what appeared to be a sheath of solid gold was in fact copper with a thin gold coating. Trinkets, adornments, statues, bullion, jewels, and everything that could be moved was taken.

If Eudoxia really had appealed to Gaiseric, she perhaps received more than she had wished for. As the Vandals left, they took the empress with them, together with her daughters, the princesses Eudocia and Galla Placidia the Younger, who in the previous year had been married to a senator of Constantinople named Olybrius (although his location at this time is not clear). Despite several imperial embassies, Eudoxia and Placidia were to suffer seven years of courteous detention before being sent to Constantinople at the entreaty of the emperor Leo I in 462. Eudocia was to remain, for she married Gaiseric’s son Huneric—she a Catholic, he an Arian—a union that would form the basis of Vandal claims to the Roman throne.

With the death of Aëtius, the chronicler Marcellinus wrote, “With him died the Western empire, nor since then has it been able to recover.” But the historian Priscus did not even mention the name of Maximus; he summed up the remaining inheritors of the Western purple disdainfully:

...although I know their names, I shall not mention them. For it so fell out that they lived only a short time after attaining the office, and as a result of this accomplished nothing worthy of mention....

For two months after the Vandals' departure a silence reigned in Rome, its senators and garrison too depressed even to find another to raise to the purple. And then in mid-August the senate met with dismay news that the Gallic provinces had taken matters into their own hands and elevated a nobleman of Avernum (the Auvergne region of southern-central France) to the vacant throne. This had happened at Arelate on July 10, 455. Hands tied, the senate accepted Eparchius Avitus without a murmur. Avitus was born of a Gallic senatorial family probably in 395, making him about sixty at his accession. He was well educated and eloquent, and had at least three children, Agricola, Ecdicius, who later became *magister militum* under Julius Nepos in 475, and Papianilla, who married Gaius Sollius Apollinaris Sidonius (c.430–c.489).

In a period of poor historical record, Sidonius stands out. He was an aristocrat of Lugdunum (Lyons), son and grandson of the *Praefectus Praetorio Galliae*, and later the bishop of Augustonemetum (Clermont). He received a classical education, undertook some military service, and married Papianilla, the daughter of Avitus; and he accompanied her father to the imperial court in Rome. Surviving the deposition of Avitus, he served as a senator and *praefectus urbi* in 468–69, before retiring to Avernum. As a bishop (472–c.489) he became an expert on ecclesiastical matters, but also vigorously defended his see against the depredations of King Euric of the Goths in 474. His position close to the center of power gave him a valuable insight into the politics of this difficult period, during which secular offices were closed to men of ability and an ecclesiastical life was an honorable alternative. He was later canonized as St. Apollinaris Sidonius (not to be confused with St. Apollinaris, a possible apostle of St. Peter in the second century).

As a boy, Avitus had formed a friendship with the Visigothic king, which extended into his early adulthood and would be the most important factor in his rise to power. The name of Avitus was first bruited in 415 when he was only twenty and chosen to head a deputation to the *magister militum* and future co-Augustus Constantius III, who was governing from Arelate and mooning over Placidia. Avitus pleaded so eloquently for some tax concessions that Constantius willingly granted his request. In his military career he

served under Aëtius and eventually rose to the rank of *Magister Peditum per Galliae*. At some point a younger brother named Theodorus was sent as a hostage to the Visigothic court of Theodoric I at Tolosa. Paying his brother a visit, Avitus so impressed the king that he was asked to renounce his Gallo-Roman nationality and live permanently at Tolosa. Sidonius tells us that this offer was rejected scornfully, but it seems that Avitus did remain for some time with Theodoric, and was instrumental in saving Narbo from a barbarian siege in 436.

Between 439–45 he served as *Praefectus Praetorio per Galliae* before retiring to his estate, Avitacum near Augustonemetum, in the heart of Avernum. But the threat of invasion by Attila the Hun in 451 brought Avitus at the request of Aëtius back to public service to use his influence with Theodoric. He, more than any other, was the conduit by which the Visigoths made alliance with Rome against the common enemy. In 455 the short-reigning Petronius Maximus appointed Avitus *magister utriusque militiae* and sent him on an embassy to Theodoric II to reconfirm the Visigoths' status as *foederati*. (After his death in battle against the Huns in 451, Theodoric I was briefly succeeded by his son Thorismund, who died in 453 to be succeeded by his brother Theodoric II.)

When the news arrived of Petronius Maximus's death and the Vandal sack of Rome, Theodoric urged Avitus to assume the purple for himself. "We do not force this on you, but we say to you: with you as leader, I am a friend of Rome; with you as emperor, I am her soldier," said Theodoric according to Sidonius. The Visigothic king had his own agenda: protection for the emperor against any other claimant and protection from the hated Vandals; in return he wanted Rome's recognition of his planned attack across the Pyrenees to wrest Hispaniae from the Suevi. This tribe had occupied almost all of the Spanish provinces since the Vandals crossed to Africa, apart from the beleaguered Roman enclave of Tarraconensis, now only centered on the hinterland of its capital Tarraco.

Avitus, having accepted his destiny, spent three months in Galliae raising a sufficient force of arms to establish his *imperium* in Rome, among them Gallic troops and contingents of barbarian allies. When the Augustus entered Rome on September 21, it was not to universal cheering. One commentator, Prosperi, noted that Avitus "entered Italy with his comrades in this appropriated honor." We are told by Sidonius that before his arrival in Rome, Avitus went and recovered

the lost provinces of Pannoniae. This unlikely expedition might possibly have recovered some part of Noricum, where the emperor had campaigned in his youth, but Pannoniae—largely freed of Huns after the nation's break up in the previous year—was now a virtual no-man's land overrun by Ostrogoths in the east and the warlike Geppidae in the west. If Pannoniae was under any nominal Roman control it was Constantinople that had the means to order it.

Ricimer, Shadow Puppet Master

The business of Avitus's sixteen-month reign was mostly preoccupied with establishing his authority with various parties; most immediately over his leading military commanders, a *comes* of the Suevi nation named Ricimer—who barely concealed his barbarian contempt for the emperor—and Majorian. To Marcian, the emperor in Constantinople since August 450, he sent an embassy asking for recognition and a sharing of the rule, but during his reign this was not forthcoming. The Vandals were the most pressing problem, since Gaiseric's fleet was still blockading Roman ports. Marcian had already asked Gaiseric to leave Italy alone, but the Vandal king did not deign him a response. Avitus also sent envoys to Gaiseric, boldly threatening that if the Vandals did not abide by the treaty of 442 he would “make preparations, trusting to the domestic forces and the support of his allies.”

The latter presumably referred to the Visigoths and the assorted *foederati* he had brought with him to Rome. The “domestic forces” were those of the Italian field army under the joint-commands of the *comites* Majorian and Ricimer—in reality the biggest threat facing Avitus. Fortunately for Avitus the ending of the sailing season in November prevented any immediate Vandal response to his bluff.

Two major events took place during 456. The first began with embassies between the courts of Theodoric II and Rechiarius, king of the Suevi. Theodoric complained of Suevi raids across the Pyrenees, but these were only an excuse to make war. In his support, the Visigothic king had *Comes* Fronto, sent as the Gallo-Roman ambassador on behalf of Avitus to insist that the Suevi stop attacking what little was left of Tarraconensis. This allowed Theodoric to pretend that his invasion was in Roman interests and under the emperor's authority. Early in the year, a massive army descended into what had been the Roman province of Gallaecia and over the summer months destroyed the Suevi kingdom. Rechiarius was defeated in a great battle at the River Urbicus (Orbigo) near Asturica Augusta (Astorga), the Suevic capital, on October 5. The king fled the field but was later captured at Portus Cale (Oporto), where he was imprisoned and then put to death. The second event was a triumph for Ricimer. As the sailing weather improved in the spring, Gaiseric recommenced raiding along the southern coast of Tyrrhenian Italy, and gathered a large fleet off Corsica. Ricimer met this threat with a smaller Roman fleet that outmaneuvered Gaiseric's and destroyed all his ships. Next he landed near Agrigentum (Agrigento) in Sicily, and defeated a

Vandal army, recovering all of the island province apart from a small enclave centered on the island's westernmost tip at Lilybaeum (Marsala).

Ricimer's victories should have reflected well on Avitus, but any joy was soured by a famine in Rome. Starved by now for over a year by the Vandal occupation of Africa, the people, led by a senate suspicious of the Avernian emperor, laid the blame at the feet of Avitus. It is easy to see why the senate should have hated him. During his brief reign Avitus only appointed Gauls to office at both junior and senior levels, denying noble Roman youths the opportunity for advancement. With such a sweeping policy of Gallicization, the senators wanted him gone, and they soon had their way. Avitus was forced to dismiss his "comitatus," the hungry barbarian contingents that were placing a greater strain on the scanty supplies than the mob could stand. And at this moment, fresh from his victory, idol of the army and the most powerful man in the empire, Ricimer publicly declared Avitus unfit to rule.

He had personal reasons for reaching this decision. Although his mother was a Visigoth, he counted himself after his father a member of the Suevi, who, through the machinations of Avitus, had been brought to destruction at the hands of Theodoric. The revolt spread to Ravenna, and on September 17 the *magister peditum*, a Visigoth Avitus had installed there named Remistus, was killed. Avitus fled from Rome toward the safety of Avernum, but was taken prisoner on October 17 at Placentia (Piacenza) by Ricimer, who now held the title of *magister utriusque militiae*. Ricimer felt unable to execute Avitus, other than his assumption of the purple an innocent old man, but he stripped him of his insignia and consecrated him as bishop at Placentia, where he died about a year later.

Majorian

Julius Valerius Maiorianus

[Augustus West April 1, 457 to August 2, 461]

For the next sixteen years, Ricimer was virtually head of the Roman commonwealth—for this is the term that best describes the last years of the Western Roman empire. Born in about 405, he was an Arian Christian and the son of a prince of the Suevi and the daughter of Walia, king of the Visigoths and successor of Athaulf. His sister was married to Gundiok, king of the Burgundi. Such connections concentrated in his hands the kind of power denied to those earlier Teutonic knights who had come to the failing empire's rescue, men like Stilicho, Merobaudes, Gainas, or Aëtius. Ricimer spent his youth at the court of Valentinian III, where he won distinction fighting under Aëtius. Ricimer was more in the mold of Stilicho and Aëtius, but he had learned how fragile the position of power behind the throne could be—Honorius had conspired against Stilicho, and Valentinian against Aëtius. Weak emperors had still managed to outmaneuver their powerful protectors. As a German, he knew there would only be unrest if he assumed the title of Augustus, so there appeared to be two options open if he were to maintain power. He could either dissolve the Western court and govern legitimately as a *dux* of the Eastern emperor, or set up his own puppet emperors and rule through them. The latter, of course, was the more attractive proposition, and he even went so far as to have his name inscribed on the coinage along with his emperors'. History deals harshly with his memory for the way in which he raised puppets one after another, and one by one broke them when he tired of their subservience or was angered by any show of independent spirit.

The first of Ricimer's shadow-Augusti, Majorian, held the post of *comes domesticorum*, commander of the elite unit of the imperial guard. He was not raised to the purple immediately after the deposition of Avitus, probably to allow time for Ricimer to enter into correspondence with Constantinople. During the four-month interregnum the *magister utriusque militiae* held all the powers of the state, until on February 28, 457 he abandoned the office, nominated Majorian in his place, and assumed the title of Patrician. By declaring himself the Patrician, Ricimer was clear that from this time on, he would be the only member of the patriciate. Majorian's elevation to the purple on the first of April 457 took place at the army camp at Columellae, six miles from Ravenna. In Constantinople the new

emperor Leo approved Ricimer's choice—only two months previously he had succeeded Marcian under circumstances similar to Majorian's elevation (detailed in the next chapter) and so was hardly in any position to cavil. As a result the two courts were in more harmony than had been the case for some years.

Majorian came of warrior stock. His maternal grandfather of the same name had held high military office in 379 when Theodosius the Great came to the throne. His father had been a faithful companion to Aëtius, and Majorian had distinguished himself as a general against Franks and Alamanni under Aëtius. Valentinian III had called Majorian from an early retirement to give him joint-command of the Italian army with Ricimer, in which role he was probably co-responsible for the overthrow of Avitus. For the first time in seventy years, Rome again had a soldier-emperor at the helm—and the last had been the usurper Magnus Maximus. In short order Majorian sent troops north to eject a small Alamanni force that had broken through the Raetian Alps and himself led an army to the rescue of the Campania, whose rich soil was being ravaged by Vandals. The enemy was driven off with some loss on their side and little to the Romans. On January 1, 458 Majorian served his consulship in conjunction with his Byzantine colleague Leo, and the rest of the year and that following were spent at war with the Visigothic king, who was aroused by the deposition of "his" emperor Avitus. The details of this war are lost, but the outcome evidently favored Majorian, for he concluded a treaty with Theodoric II that included rights for the Romans to use Gothic bases in Spain for a reconquest of Africa.

Majorian's Judicial Additions

In his administration, Majorian was able to demonstrate the flexibility of the *Codex Theodosianus*, to which he made a number of remarkable *novellae* (additions). Their nature tells a tale of Italy at the time, of a desperate misery in the main. The population was falling due to a decline in the birth rate, so Majorian forbade women to become nuns until their fortieth year, and made widows remarry a second husband five years after the death of the first—these laws despite the force of the Church against them. It had become a customary practice among impoverished families burdened with too many children to force younger sons into the clergy to keep down the cost of raising them. More often than not, this was done against the son's will. Under Majorian's *novella*, where this was proven, the family was forced to remit one-third of their property to the forcibly consecrated son, who was permitted to return to secular life. Any archdeacon found guilty of co-operating in the offense was fined. Majorian remitted all arrears of taxes and revived the institution of the *defensor civitatis* that had originally come into being in the first half of the fourth century. This civil servant's duty was to protect the poor and inform the emperor of abuses committed by rapacious imperial officers in his name—a form of local ombudsman.

The wording of one *novella* in particular points to the destruction of Rome's greatest monuments that was already taking place at this time, the material being used for new constructions:

We...are determined to remedy the detestable process which has long been going on, whereby the face of the venerable city is disfigured. For it is too plain that the public edifices... are being pulled to pieces at the suggestion of the city officials, on the pretense that the stones are wanted for public works....We therefore decree that no buildings or ancient monuments raised by our forefathers for use of beauty, shall be destroyed by any man.

Returning to his war with the Vandals, Majorian had conceived of a strategy for the recovery of Africa: not with a frontal assault on Carthage, but by an invasion of Mauretania from Spain. To that end—with the aid of Theodoric—a fleet of three hundred *triremes* was gathered in the harbor of Carthago Nova (Cartagena). However, Gaiseric got wind of the plan, and laid waste the provinces of Mauretania that Majorian intended as his beach head. And then in May 460, by some means not recorded, the Vandal king managed to sneak into the harbor where the Roman fleet was in preparation and

carry off the ships. Writing a century later, Procopius tells a delightfully silly tale of how, in order to ascertain his enemy's strength, Majorian dyed his telltale golden hair a bluish-black and in this disguise took himself as an ambassador to Carthage and Gaiseric's court. The Vandal king, apparently, fell into a great fear when he later discovered how he had been tricked, and prepared for war, but was saved because before the Roman fleet could sail, Majorian fell ill with dysentery and died. So, perhaps, should an Augustus who looked to be a promise of recovery have unfortunately but honestly expired; but the truth was otherwise.

No doubt Majorian's failure to retake Africa detracted from his reputation, but his real downfall came about because of the very qualities the empire so desperately needed: a zealous military nature and the hands of sound administration. These were proving far too spirited for the great Patrician, and Ricimer dethroned him on August 2, 461 and had him put to death near Dertona (Tortona).

[34. Link to: Puppet Emperors](#)

Severus III
Libius Severus

[Augustus West November 19, 461 to August 15, 465]

To say that Libius Severus was a Lucanian from the south of Italy, that he “lived religiously,” and to give the dates of his reign is the sum of knowledge about Ricimer’s second puppet. His death in Rome may have been the result of natural causes or it may have been because he drank from a cup poisoned by the Patrician’s hand. The events of his four-year reign, therefore, barely concern Libius Severus, rather more those outside the sphere of his ineffective influence.

In the East Leo refused to recognize the “usurper” of his colleague Majorian’s throne, throwing out phrases like: “Severus, who snatched the sovereignty of the West.” To the south Gaiseric also had reason to be displeased by the turn of events, for he had nominated his own candidate. As has been related, six years earlier in 455 Gaiseric had carried off from Rome the Augusta Eudoxia and her two daughters to Carthage. According to the contemporary historian Priscus:

Gaiseric, although many embassies had been sent to him at different times, did not dismiss the women until he had betrothed the elder daughter of Valentinian (Eudocia was her name) to his son Huneric. Then he sent back Eudoxia, the daughter of Theodosius II, with Placidia, her other daughter, whom Olybrius had married. Gaiseric did not cease from ravaging Italy and Sicily, but pillaged them the more, desiring that, after Majorian, Olybrius would be emperor of the Romans of the West by reason of his kinship by marriage.

Olybrius was, of course, Huneric’s brother-in-law, and by this loose connection, Gaiseric demanded his right to determine the Roman ruler. To the northwest Aëgidius, a comrade of Majorian, raised the standard of revolt in Belgica and made a dangerous alliance with Gaiseric. Aëgidius was the last *Magister Militum per Galliae* and he had exiled himself from Ricimer’s long arm to Noviodunum (Soissons), which was in the hands of the Salian Franks. There, he had been chosen by the Franks to be their king, with the title *Rex Romanorum*, and was now bent on revenging Majorian’s death. He sent to Gaiseric to become his partner in a joint invasion of Italy. The plan was foiled, however, when Aëgidius was attacked by the Visigoths over a border dispute, and slain some time after the start of 464. The Visigoths annexed a large part of his territory, but, Aëgidius’s son Syagrius held onto Noviodunum and adopted his father’s title, thereafter enlarging his small kingdom again at the expense of the Visigoths. Syagrius was

the last of the independent Roman administrators of Gaul, and from 464–86 he governed a sizeable territory lying between the Mosa, the Scaldus, and the Sequana (Meuse, Scheldt, and Seine rivers). In 486 Syagrius found himself in the path of the territorial expansion of the Salian Frankish king Hlodwig or Chlodovech (Clovis) and was defeated at the battle of Soissons in the same year. Syagrius fled to seek refuge at Tolosa with Alaric II, but the Visigothic king faced his own problems with the emergent Frankish nation, and had no wish to give Clovis an excuse to make war. Instead of granting Syagrius sanctuary he imprisoned him and then extradited him to Clovis, who had him secretly executed in 487. Within a short space of time the Franks expanded to occupy all of the ancient provinces of Roman Galliae (except for Amorica), pushing the Visigoths south of the Pyrenees. For a while, only the Burgundi retained any national sovereignty, but by the sixth century, they too were absorbed, and all the Frankish subjects—Celtic Gauls, Romano-Gauls, Alans, Burgundi—became known simply as “Franks.”

When, almost unnoticed, Libius Severus slipped away on August 15, 465, Ricimer nominated no successor, and for the next twenty months the Patrician was the sole source of government in the West. During this period, he must have pondered on whether there was any point in expending the commonwealth’s dwindling income on the figure-head of an emperor when it was he that did the actual work. However, there was pressure from Leo in the East, who had his own candidate to be his imperial colleague, and a failure to respond might lead to a costly war. And that raised the consideration of whether a better benefit was to be obtained by an alliance with Constantinople or Carthage, for Gaiseric was insistently championing his candidate Olybrius. Eventually, to the Vandal’s towering rage, the decision went to Constantinople, and Ricimer agreed to Leo’s choice of Anthemius to be the next wearer of the Western purple.

Anthemius

Procopius Anthemius

[Augustus West April 12, 467 to July 11, 472]

In the spring of 467 the population of Rome came out to Portus Augusti et Traiani at Ostia to greet their new emperor, colleague of Leo I in Constantinople. Accompanying Anthemius was his wife Euphemia, daughter of an emperor, his sons Marcian (whose rebellion in 479 is discussed in chapter fifteen), Romulus and Procopius, and his daughter Alypia. It should be imagined that among the throng of senators, soldiers and the mob, Ricimer was also there to welcome—and assess—this somewhat less than known quantity: spirited or subservient? At some point along the Via Ostiensis toward Rome, on April 12, Anthemius received the imperial powers of the Western Roman empire—in reality only Italy and a precarious toehold down the Rhône valley and in Avernum.

Anthemius was the son-in-law of Marcian, the previous emperor of the East, and a Byzantine noble of standing. On his father's side he was descended from Procopius, the kinsman of Julian Apostate who revolted against Valens and briefly seized the throne of Constantinople. On his mother's side his grandfather Anthemius had been the praetorian prefect and regent to Theodosius II, the real architect of the great land wall of Constantinople. He himself had risen to become *comes Illyriae*, *magister peditum* and a consul. Spurned as Marcian's successor, he had served Leo loyally and won him a decisive victory over marauding Huns and Ostrogoths near Serdica (Sofia) in 455. This, then, was the man Ricimer had to judge, so it is questionable as to whether it was the Patrician cementing his hold over the emperor when he married Anthemius's daughter Alypia at the end of the same year, or vice versa. No one asked what Alypia thought.

One important part of the compact between Ricimer and Leo that had led to the elevation of Anthemius was to take war to Africa in concert and rid the world of Gaiseric and his Vandal kingdom. The description of this vast and doomed undertaking more properly belongs to the Eastern sphere, and is detailed in the following chapter. Anthemius, however, also faced a war in the West against the Visigoths and their able king, Euric (466–84), who had recently succeeded Theodoric II. Euric decided that the continual changes of emperor meant that Rome was so divided that he could take over all of Galliae without opposition. Anthemius called on the Armorican

Bretons for help, but in 469 Euric defeated their king, Riothamus, who fled to the Burgundi—still Rome’s allies—for sanctuary. Two years later, Anthemius undertook yet another offensive against the Visigoths, but again it was a disaster, and marked the end of any Roman influence in the Gallic provinces. Now everything except Italy was lost in the West beyond small, short-lived pockets around Arelate, Massilia, and in Avernum, heartland of that valorous Gallic tribe the Averni, whose most famous son, Prince Vercingetorix, bravely resisted Julius Caesar before the dawn of empire. Here Ecdicius, son of the late emperor Avitus, now led Roman resistance against new barbarians.

The honeymoon period—if there had ever really been one—for Anthemius and Ricimer was over. The great enterprise against Carthage that might have united Patrician and Augustus failed, and failure only emphasized that Rome and Ricimer had humbled themselves before the East to no avail. The almost complete loss of everything beyond the Alps contributed to a sense of despair, and hot-headed Anthemius was increasingly fretting at his puppet status. When his health began to fail, Anthemius accused various persons of working magic on him, and several were put to death, including Romanus, the *magister militum* and an adherent of Ricimer. The Patrician left Rome in anger and took himself to Mediolanum, where he called to his standard the troops who had served under him in the Vandal war. He also enjoyed the support of his brother-in-law, the king of the Burgundi. However, Ricimer was persuaded by the Ligurian nobles to attempt reconciliation, and the task fell to Epiphanius, bishop of Mediolanum. Anthemius was not easy to please, he is said to have retorted: “I have not even spared my own flesh and blood [to please him], but have given my daughter to this skin-clothed Goth [*sic*], an alliance I cannot think on without shame for myself....” But the words of Epiphanius swayed him, and a truce was effected.

The peace was of short duration. In a little over a year hostilities broke out in early 472. Having learned what was happening, the Eastern emperor Leo dispatched the senator Olybrius to Mediolanum to arbitrate between Ricimer and Anthemius, or perhaps (as some accounts claim) to wrest the crown from Anthemius. In any event, at this point—about April—Ricimer proclaimed Olybrius emperor, thereby conciliating Gaiseric and possibly neutralizing the opposition of friends of Anthemius at the Byzantine court, since Olybrius was also a Byzantine. Ricimer then marched on Rome, besieged the city for five months, and reduced its inhabitants to a piteous state of starvation. At

the end of this period, there was a last desperate battle “near the bridge of Hadrian,” and Ricimer entered Rome, found the emperor and slew him. One source (Joannes Antiochenus) claims that Anthemius himself threw open the gates and was slain by Ricimer’s young nephew Gundobad. Anthemius perished on July 11, 472, leaving Olybrius, Gaiseric’s unexpected prize candidate, on the throne. Olybrius might have worried that his fate would be similar to his immediate predecessor’s, another puppet in Ricimer’s stable of shadow emperors, but the great Patrician suffered a hemorrhage a few days later and died on August 18.

One footnote to this final battle is of interest. Among the combatants was a certain barbarian called Odoacer, who would soon make himself Rome’s first king in almost a thousand years.

Olybrius

Ancius Olybrius

[Augustus West April 472 to October 23, 472]

Such was the state of the time that history can supply some detail about Olybrius the *privatus*, but little or nothing of Olybrius Augustus. He was a scion of the powerful Anician family of Italy. In about 454 he had married Galla Placidia the Younger, daughter of Valentinian III and Licinia Eudoxia, and the sister of Eudocia who was married to Gaiseric's son Huneric. When Gaiseric captured Rome and the Vandals took Eudoxia and her two daughters with them, it is presumed that Olybrius was in Constantinople and so avoided the sack but suffered the distress of knowing that his wife was held at Carthage. By virtue of his sister-in-law's marriage to Huneric, he became a vassal kinsman to the Vandal king.

In duration his reign lasted for barely eight months, and of the first five nothing is known except for his coinage struck in Mediolanum. It was a time of upheaval, and it is reasonable to imagine that he accompanied Ricimer's attack on Anthemius and took part in the siege. As to his fitness to rule, abilities in legislation, or fiscal policies, Olybrius's own death of "dropsy" little more than three months after his predecessor's precludes any conjecture. From a political perspective, Ricimer's choice had been wise. Not only would Olybrius's Italian aristocratic heritage have recommended him to the senate, but he would have been a more palatable candidate than the Greek Anthemius.

Only one item of his administration is clear: after Ricimer's death he conferred the title of Patrician on the young Burgundian prince Gundobad, whose mother was sister to Ricimer. Gundobad had come to Italy to seek his fortune with his powerful uncle and found his desires fulfilled somewhat sooner than he could have hoped for. With the title came the loyalty of the majority barbarian element of the Roman army and so, when Olybrius dropped dead on October 23, 472, into young Gundobad's hands fell the remnants of the Western Roman empire.

[Augustus West March 5, 473 to June 24, 474]

There was another interregnum, this time of five months, doubtless a necessary pause while Gundobad consolidated his power and learned a little more about what was what and who was who. Then, on March 5, 473, he raised the *Comes Domesticorum* Glycerius to the throne at Ravenna, and it seems as though the new emperor reigned only in the north because none of his coinage was struck in Rome, only in Mediolanum and Ravenna. Not surprisingly, the Byzantine court of aging Leo refused to accept Gundobad's puppet, viewing Glycerius as an Augustus made "more by presumption than by constitutional selection." Leo appointed Julius Nepos, *magister peditum* of Dalmatia, to command an army and go to Italy to reclaim it from the usurper. But Leo died in January of 474 to be succeeded by his grandson, the infant Leo II, with his father Zeno as regent and co-Augustus. Incongruously, these events meant that Glycerius was the most senior of the three reigning emperors.

Immediately, Glycerius was faced with a new barbarian threat. Theudemir and Widemir were the brother-kings of the Ostrogoths who had settled in Pannoniae. For twenty years they had engaged in warfare with their barbarian neighbors, Suevi, Huns, and Sarmatae, and their settlements had become impoverished. Eventually they heeded the cries of their people for the conquest of richer lands and split the tasks between them. With his more powerful force Theudemir intended to attack the stronger Eastern Roman empire, while Widemir took his weaker force into Italy. It seems, however, that he died in this enterprise, and it was his son, also Widemir, who was the recipient of an embassy from Glycerius. With blandishments and flattery, the emperor shamelessly suggested the Ostrogoths bypass Italy and go to raid in Galliae, theoretically still a part of the empire and only in a tiny part actually so. The smooth-talking worked, and Widemir led his Ostrogoths across the Alps and down into the valleys of the Rhodanus and Liger (Loire), where they soon made cause with their kinsmen the Visigoths, and removed from Rome those few remaining outposts of imperial resistance in the south: Arelate and Massilia; Avernum and a tiny enclave north of Remi alone held out.

The ignominy of Glycerius's foreign policy did nothing to endear him to his subjects, and he seems to have spent much of his time in Ligurian Italy, hovering close by his patron's Burgundian territory. One instance underlines his unpopularity. Unable to excoriate the

emperor in person, the populace of Ticinum (Pavia) treated his mother, who dwelt there, so insultingly that he threatened severe reprisals for their behavior and was only dissuaded from carrying out his threat by Epiphanius, the city's saintly bishop. No one, therefore, was greatly perturbed to hear that Julius Nepos was coming to the rescue, and Glycerius was on his own. Even the puppet-master Gundobad deserted in the hour of his emperor's need, for his father Gundiok had died shortly after Ricimer, and the Patrician decided that his future was better served by taking up the Burgundian mantle there rather than face hostilities with a powerful Byzantine army.

Glycerius must have perceived the outcome. Without the support of senate, people or army, his cause was lost, and he made his way to Rome to throw himself on the mercy of the Eastern invader. So it was that on June 24, 474, Julius Nepos was raised to the purple where he had landed, at the Portus Augusti et Traiani opposite old Ostia, and granted the deposed Glycerius his life and retirement to obscurity as a consecrated bishop in Dalmatia. His kindly fate recalls that of Avitus, but unlike the former bishop of Placentia, Glycerius survived for a considerable time. And, in the following year, he enjoyed sweet revenge of a kind, when Nepos was forced out of Italy and returned to Dalmatia whence he had come, to discover that Glycerius was to be his personal bishop.

Julius Nepos

[Augustus West June 24, 474 to August 28, 475, abdicated]

Julius Nepos, son of Nepotianus, *magister peditum* in Thracia between 458–61, and nephew of the Patrician Marcellinus, *magister peditum* in Dalmatia between 461–68, was married to a niece of the emperor Leo. The major events of his fourteen-month reign took place in what was left of the Gallic provinces, as the Visigoths attempted to wrest Avernum from imperial control. Unlike that friend of Rome, Theodoric II, his brother King Euric was a bitter Arian and strongly anti-Roman. Sidonius, who had been elected bishop of Augustonemetum in 472 described Euric's sentiments. "I fear that this Gothic king is plotting not so much against the walls of Roman cities as against the laws of Christian churches." But it was against the walls of Augustonemetum that Euric's fury fell in 474, stoutly defended by Ecdicius, son of the former emperor Avitus. Nepos bestowed on Ecdicius the title of Patrician and made him *magister militum* of the Roman army, although this was an empty position because the emperor had no resources to send him. At the end of the campaigning season, Euric withdrew, leaving the city untaken but with half its walls in lying in ruins; a return of the Goths next season would write its end.

However, in the following year Euric changed his strategy and threatened an invasion of Italy by way of the Maritime Alps, along the coastal route once made fit for troop movements by Marius in the days of the late Republic, and regularly used by Julius Caesar in his conquest of Gaul. To counter this alarming development, a council of Ligurian bishops turned to Epiphanius, the peacemaker of his age. The bishop set out across the Alps to seek an embassy with Euric and persuade him to desist from his planned invasion. In this mission Epiphanius was successful, but at the cost of Nepos having to agree to abandon Avernum to the Visigoths. The fate of brave Ecdicius is unclear, and conflicting sources of the time do little to throw any light on the matter, but in effect he disappears from the story with the fall of Avernum to the Visigoths through treacherous Roman diplomacy.

Nepos now needed a replacement for the offices of Patrician and *magister militum* and appointed a certain Orestes, who promptly took his army from Rome to Ravenna, and there proclaimed his son Romulus emperor. Like his predecessor, Nepos had little alternative but flight, and left Italy for Salonae in Dalmatia on August 28, 475. Nepos outlived the Western empire by four years, dying on May 15, 480 at the hands of assassins, the *comes* Ovida and Viator, whose

motives for his murder are unknown.

[Augustus West October 31, 475 to September 4, 476 abdicated]

Patrician Orestes had had a curious career. An Illyrian provincial born in Pannonia, he had made his way to the court of Attila as a young man, where he had been employed by the king of the Huns as his personal *notarius*. After Attila's death he had entered imperial service, and commanded the household troops under the short-lived emperor Anthemius. At the time of his revolt against Nepos, his son Romulus was aged about fourteen, so it remains a mystery as to why Orestes did not seize the purple himself. For he was as full-blooded a Roman as Trajan or Diocletian, and therefore did not suffer the drawback of barbarian prospects like Arbogast, Stilicho, or Ricimer. Perhaps it is an indication of how low the prestige of the title Augustus had fallen in men's minds that real power should be more identified with the title Patrician.

Nevertheless, it was his young son he placed on Ravenna's throne, and at his accession the boy became Romulus Augustus, but everyone knew him as Augustulus, the "little emperor." The short reign of this, the last Roman emperor in the West, so poignantly bearing the name of the nation's founder and wearing the title bestowed on its first great princeps, was marked only by one significant event, a peace treaty with Gaiseric. Orestes concluded this, probably in return for Rome confirming the Vandals' toehold on Sicily at Lilybaeum. However, it was not the barbarians abroad that would bring down the Western Roman empire, but those within Italy.

By this time the Roman army contained no man of genuine Roman extraction, let alone even any Italians or at the very least Gallic troops. It was composed of the many Teutonic tribesmen that had taken service with the eagles of the ancient legions more and more over the past hundred years. These troops now asked Orestes for what Rome had granted the Visigoths, a land of their own. However, unlike the settlement given to Walia, the barbarian legionaries wanted one-third of Italy for themselves, and this was an outrageous demand a Roman like Orestes could never accede to. He probably believed that it would be open to negotiation, but he misjudged the temper of his own soldiers. Under the leadership of Orestes' own standard-bearer—the Herulian Goth Odoacer, who was first heard of outside the walls of Rome at the deposition of Anthemius—the soldiers mutinied.

Orestes retreated with his loyal retainers and Romulus to the dubious sanctuary of Ticinum, pursued by the mutineers, hoping that

their discipline would dissolve without his leadership and their resolve fail. But Odoacer proved a resilient general, and the town was surrounded and quickly taken. For two terrible days Ticinum was sacked, as the enraged plunderers tried to find Orestes and the boy-emperor. Peace only settled when it was revealed that their quarry had fled again, this time to Placentia (Piacenza). And it was there, only five days after the elevation of Odoacer, that Orestes was taken and at once beheaded.

Young Romulus did not share his father's end because he had continued his flight to Ravenna in the company of his uncle Paulus, who was probably hoping to take ship to Constantinople. Sadly, Odoacer's men found him, and Paulus was slain. However, when Romulus was dragged before the victorious Odoacer at Ravenna, the Goth was moved to mercy by the boy's innocent beauty and his pitiful state. Instead of having him executed, Odoacer granted the little Augustus a palace and a generous pension for life. And so on September 4, 476 Romulus Augustulus retired to the splendid villa near Neapolis that had originally been built by Lucius Lucullus, the great Republican general who had defeated Mithridates. Not even a fragment of history exists to tell us anything more of the fate of the last Roman emperor of the West.

POWER IN THE EAST

[AD 450–518]

Marcian

Flavius Valerius Marcianus

[Augustus East August 25, 450 to January 457]

The death of Theodosius II had left the question of the succession open for the first time in over sixty years, since his only surviving child, Licinia Eudoxia, had married Valentinian III. As the Augusta, Theodosius's sister Pulcheria was the logical choice for the throne, although not the normal one—no woman before her had succeeded to the Roman empire. However, it was where Pulcheria desired to be and she was aided in this by Flavius Aspar, the son of Ardaburius and hero of Ravenna in 425 in the battle that deposed the usurper Joannes and placed young Valentinian III on the Western throne. He selected an officer on his staff named Marcian and engineered his candidacy as her husband. Pulcheria pragmatically consented in return for a pledge that her new husband would honor her vow of virginity. With the support of Aspar and the last representative of the Theodosian house in the East, Marcian received the acclamation of the senate and the army. On August 25, 450, Pulcheria sat beside her husband while the bishop of Constantinople placed the imperial diadem on his head. It symbolized that Marcian shared in the imperial powers and it was also the first instance of a religious coronation, soon to be much imitated in the West. Supporting Marcian's claim, Pulcheria gave out (truthfully or not) that Theodosius on his deathbed had nominated him as her groom. That this was a political union is underlined by the fact that Marcian kept his promise and respected his wife's virginity and swore to be a staunch champion of religious orthodoxy. Soon after, he had his only daughter, Aelia Marcia Euphemia, marry the future Western emperor, Anthemius.

Later Byzantine writers looked back at Marcian's seven-year reign as something of a golden age. He secured the political and financial security of the East, established the orthodox line to which with few exceptions future Byzantine emperors would adhere, and achieved a remarkable degree of political stability. Nevertheless, despite his undoubted abilities, much of his success must also be accorded to luck.

Relatively little is known about Marcian before his accession to the throne. The chronicles variously ascribe his birthplace as being Illyricum and Thracia, but generally consent to 392 as his natal year. Like many other public men from that region, he made his career in the military. His father had been a soldier and Marcian served under Ardaburius and Aspar, first at Philippopolis in Thracia. In 421–22 he went as a tribune with his unit to fight the Persians, but apparently fell ill in Lycia and never saw action in the campaign. From this relatively inauspicious beginning, he served as *domesticus* to Aspar, by then the *magister utriusque militiae*. While this placed Marcian in the military elite, it did not provide him with any singular distinction. In 432, he served with Aspar in the failed North African campaign, where he was captured by the Vandals. Later fanciful stories claim that Marcian met Gaiseric, who predicted he would one day become emperor (see the following section). From this point to his accession in 450, nothing is known other than his eventual return at some point to Constantinople with borrowed funds and his elevation to the senatorial rank, most certainly thanks to Aspar.

As was related at the end of chapter thirteen, Marcian's reign began with an immediate change in policy toward the Huns. In Theodosius's last years the eunuch chamberlain Chrysaphius had been the architect of a futile plot to assassinate Attila in an attempt to staunch the flow of tribute payments. In 448 Chrysaphius had managed to suborn one of Attila's envoys by the name of Edecon and involve him in the murder plot. Perhaps Edecon was an agent provocateur on a mission to uncover the eunuch's duplicity, because when the Byzantine mission arrived at Attila's camp, he confessed the whole plot. Attila demanded that Theodosius deliver up his chamberlain for execution, but when those courtiers who supported Pulcheria—a natural enemy of anyone with her brother's ear—clamored for Chrysaphius's death, Theodosius showed some backbone, and refused. Spirit went only so far, however. The embarrassed emperor agreed to pay Attila his blood money but ensured that Chrysaphius contributed generously. As a result, Attila dropped his demands for the eunuch's killing. It benefited him little in the long run. With Pulcheria back in power, Chrysaphius's days could be counted on the fingers of one hand. Marcian had him executed and then refused to pay any further tribute to Attila.

Marcian's obduracy may have been ill-founded, but as it turned out, he was enormously successful. As previously described, Attila had

already become too absorbed in Western imperial politics to deal with the recalcitrant Marcian, and before he could refocus his attention on the East the Hun died in 453 and his empire disintegrated. Marcian quickly formed alliances with those peoples previously under Hunnish domination, especially the Ostrogoths, to thwart their re-emergence. Indeed, he even granted them *foederati* status and permitted their settlement in Pannoniae. At one stroke, the new emperor had established peace in his European dominions, and consequently benefited from his gamble. The senatorial aristocracy, which had been strongly opposed to Theodosius treating with barbarians, heartily supported Marcian's decision to refuse Attila, and the policy also resulted in saving the *fiscus* enormous sums. By the end of his reign, Marcian was able to leave his successor one hundred thousand pounds of gold.

Marcian's financial policies were designed to further his standing with the aristocracy, already predisposed toward him. The *collatio glebalis*, the property tax so obnoxious to the senatorial class, was easily repealed, since the emperor no longer had to subsidize the Huns. Marcian also ended many of the financial obligations owed by praetors, who were expected to put on lavish public games and distribute a *congiarium* to the populace of Constantinople. This was particularly hard on provincial senators, who had to move to ruinously expensive Constantinople for the months of their office. Now only the highest-ranking senators, the *illustres*, were eligible to serve and even they were relieved of spending the huge sums that had been traditionally associated with holding the office. Marcian attempted to address other financial issues. On his accession he proclaimed a remission of all aged debts owed to the state. While this most benefited the wealthier classes, it did to some extent improve life for a broader spectrum of society. He also campaigned against the sale of government offices, a corrupt practice whose endemic nature continually led to bureaucratic instability.

A few of Marcian's legal enactments survive. In the second *novella* of his legal code he defined the business of an emperor as being "to provide for the care of the human race." The first *novella* deals with complaints about the government from "endless crowds of petitioners... because of the want of integrity and severity" in the judges. Perhaps his most significant *novella* rescinded a law of Constantine, which had in turn been an extension of an Augustan law, which made it unlawful for a member of the senatorial class to marry

a *humilis* (freeborn poor woman), Marcian's edict allowed such a match on the presumption that the lady in question was of good moral character. The change in the law later benefited the emperor Justin in the 520s, when, with a little further modification, he was able to permit his son Justinian to marry Theodora.

Little military action happened during Marcian's tenure apart from some minor campaigns against Saracens in Syria and the Blemmyes in Egypt. In these two provinces there was also domestic revolt as a result of the Council of Chalcedon (see below). The absence of large-scale conflict also meant that the emperor was able to amass more funds than might otherwise have been the case. But it seems, too, that Marcian actively avoided confrontation: the assassination of Valentinian III and the subsequent Vandal sack of Rome in 455 were met with silence from the East. The emperor contented himself with sending embassies to Gaiseric requesting the surrender of the empress Eudoxia, and her daughters, Placidia and Eudocia. These were unsuccessful and so, according to Priscus, in about 456 Marcian resorted to sending a bishop "of Gaiseric's own [Arian] sect" named Bledas. But again the embassy was met with refusal, and it was to be Marcian's successor Leo who secured the women's release.

The Decline of Papal Influence

The chief event of Marcian's reign was the beginning of the great monophysite quarrel and the Council of Chalcedon. Shortly after his accession the conspicuously pious and orthodox emperor had written in friendly and respectful tones to Pope Leo the Great. He called him the "guardian of the Faith" and asked for his prayers, declaring himself anxious to support the council the pope had proposed in order to settle the question raised by the monophysites Eutyches and Dioscurus. Leo had already asked Theodosius II to summon a council, and Marcian clearly only meant to carry out this commission as Theodosius's successor; however, his involvement was to have lasting repercussions. Marcian was no friend to Dioscurus, the archbishop of Alexandria, since he had tried and failed to prevent the emperor's recognition in Egypt. The aged Eutyches had been for thirty years archimandrite of a monastery outside the walls of Constantinople, and although not a learned man, carried the banner of the Monophysite cause. His teaching had disturbed the Eastern Church since immediately after the Council of Ephesus in 431, and he had been accused of heresy in 448 and dismissed.

Pope Leo hoped for a time to restore peace without another general council, and wrote to Marcian saying so. However, it is clear that in summoning a council on May 17, 451 Marcian was acting on a misunderstanding and that he had not yet received the pope's letter. Leo accepted the *fait accompli* and appointed the bishop of Lilybaeum, Paschasius, and a priest named Bonifacius as his legates. The council, which was to have met at Nicaea, where many bishops had already gathered, was delayed because Marcian was too involved in the business of government to leave the capital. Instead he ordered the bishops to Chalcedon, on the other side of the Bosphorus from Constantinople, so that he could attend without leaving the capital. Eventually, the council opened in the church of St. Euphemia on October 8 and lasted until the first of November. Given that between five and six hundred clerics attended, and the council's remarkably brief duration, it is nothing short of astonishing that any decisions should have been reached at all. And yet the council achieved everything it set out to do. Eutyches, who had been reinstated in 449, was again condemned; and a new statement of faith was drawn up, known as the Chalcedonian Definition, according to which Christ was established as the possessor of one person with two natures—human and divine.

The monophysite controversy that was the main issue at the Council of Chalcedon concerned the political and religious tensions between the Christians at Alexandria and those at Antioch. The argument revolved around Christ's nature(s). Antiochene theologians stressed Christ's human nature because he needed to be truly human if he were to be considered the savior of man, while the monophysite Alexandrians stressed Christ's divinity and his role as teacher of divine truth. These differences were intensified by the rivalry between the two ancient sees—the Antiochenes had been better at getting their candidates appointed at Constantinople, by this time the most powerful bishopric in the East.

In essence, the outcome of the council was to define Christ's nature as combining both the Antiochene and Alexandrian concepts, but in so doing it refuted the Alexandrian monophysite definition and declared it a heresy. The same fate befell Antiochene Nestorians, adherents of the teachings of Nestorius, who had become bishop of Constantinople in 428. He argued that Mary should be called the "bearer of Christ," not the "bearer of God," thus stressing that Mary was the mother of his human nature, that Christ's divine nature was separate and eternal and did not come through his human mother. To a modern mind, the machinations of fifth- and sixth-century theology come down to hair-splitting, but at the time these were matters of great import and quite capable of sparking violent reaction between the adherents of one or another creed.

An interesting aside to the events of the council is that when he attended the sixth session on October 25 the emperor opened proceedings with a speech in Latin, emphasizing that it was still the Eastern empire's official language on solemn occasions.

On February 27, 452, Marcian, in conjunction with Valentinian III, proclaimed that the decrees of the council were the law of the empire. But there was another, less satisfactory outcome for the Western Church. When the main business of the council was completed, the delegates decreed that the see of Constantinople should rank second only to that of Rome, that its bishop be given the title "patriarch," and its control be extended to cover the whole Eastern empire. While the papal legates were obliged to accept this ruling, they were unable to swallow its clear implication: from that point on the pope's supremacy would be only titular, and that the two sees would in reality be equal. From this famous decree, known as Canon Twenty-Eight, derived the ecclesiastical rivalry between the Latin and Orthodox Churches that

would grow increasingly bitter over the centuries.

Marcian's proclamation of the Chalcedonian Definition produced uniformity at Constantinople and in the European provinces, but he was unable to enforce them so successfully in Syria and Egypt. The rest of his reign was troubled by revolution in these provinces, unrest only quelled after his death when the party of Aspar began to compromise with the heretics. Marcian remained largely beholden to his former patron, and his trust was repaid. Aspar was appointed *Magister Militum per Orientem* and given the title First Patrician, while his eldest son Ardabur (named for his grandfather) was made *magister utriusque militiae*. This preference of the Teutonic element of the court was unpopular and, despite the Aspar's power, a strong anti-Germanic sentiment sprang up among the aristocracy. Nonetheless, when Marcian died aged sixty-five in January 457—reportedly of gangrene in his feet caused by too much pious penitence—it was to Aspar that everyone turned. Marcian, without a son as a consequence of respecting the wishes of his imperial wife (and having none illegitimate), had nominated no one as his successor; and Pulcheria had preceded him to the grave in 453. Thus the throne of Constantinople looked emptier than it had done since the death of Julian.

It was expected that Aspar would adorn himself with the purple. He had earned great recognition as long ago as 424 at Ravenna. In 432 he commanded the army Theodosius II sent to North Africa against Gaiseric, and although this failed in its objective Aspar's reputation had remained undiminished. In fact there had been no reason why Aspar should not have succeeded Theodosius, rather than place his domestic Marcian on the throne; but for two things. He was an Alan and, like nearly all Christian barbarians, an Arian. There could be no question, therefore, of Aspar's own elevation to the purple. However, like Arbogast sixty-four years before, and like his colleague in the West, Ricimer, he was content to be a king-maker. The First Patrician's choice fell on another of his staff, an orthodox Christian named Leo.

Leo I

Flavius Valerius Leo

[Augustus East February 7, 457 to January 18, 474]

When it came to managing his choice of emperor, Aspar was to have less success than Ricimer, his colleague in the West. In part, this was due to the character of the man he chose, but the process of coronation also had an effect. However the elevation of the emperor, whether through inheritance or—like Marcian and Leo—by the means of domestic service, once he was hailed Augustus, the elaborate Byzantine court ceremonial wrapped him in divinity in the eyes of the adoring crowd. Only the most ascetic of men could avoid being enveloped in the trappings of power this gave. In being made Augustus, Leo became the part and took on the dignity of his purple mantle. He still enjoyed the traditional honor of being raised on the soldiers' shields, but then, as Marcian had done, he attended a mass in the Church of Holy Wisdom to be formally crowned by Patriarch Anatolius. The significant difference between this and Marcian's coronation is that Leo received the imperial diadem from a prelate who, after the Council of Chalcedon, was the recognized head of the Church in the East. In this there is a clear indication of the increased importance of the patriarchate's recognition of the Augustus, and a clear reflection of how the order of accession was changing—away from the traditional soldier-proclaimed emperor to a new, religious, more mystical concept of kingship, in which the Church's tacit approval was at least as important, if not more so, than that of the soldiers.

Leo hailed from Dacia, and was born there in about 401. His upbringing was probably little different to that of Marcian, and his eventual position on Aspar's staff hints at a respectable early military career. Before his elevation to the purple he had married Aelia Verina, and they had three children: Ariadne was born before his accession, a second daughter Leontia was born in 457, and an unnamed son died aged five months in 463. (The timing of the two daughters' births in relation to Leo's accession was to have a bearing on the events of a rebellion against Leo's successor, Zeno, in 479.) Of Verina's origins, little is known, but the name Aelia was probably assumed when she became empress, since it had been commonly retained as an Augusta's name from the time of Theodosius I's first wife, Aelia Flacilla. She had a brother named Basiliscus, who also benefited from this sudden proximity to the throne.

Within two months of his accession Leo made moves to improve relations with the Western empire, by recognizing Ricimer's choice of Majorian as emperor, and agreeing to serve with his imperial colleague in the consulship in 458. This accord with Ricimer was ultimately to lead to the ill-fated joint-expedition against Gaiseric, but more importantly it increased Leo's influence in the West (although the two fell out for four years over Ricimer's replacement for Majorian, Libius Severus, in 461). These actions point up an important aspect of Leo's character. He had little formal education, but he was possessed of sound common sense and—as it turned out—an independent mind. The servility of the Byzantine court was useful to the new emperor. He learned rapidly how to play the various factions off against each other, and from his success in this drew the confidence to resist the too imperious edicts of his erstwhile patron Aspar.

If Leo was supposed to be a puppet in the mold of Ricimer's, Aspar soon found himself mistaken. Within weeks of his accession, a furious row broke out between them when Aspar asked Leo to appoint one of his fellow Arians to the post of urban prefect. According to the contemporary historian Candidus, this was a certain Vivianus. Due to his long history of deference Leo gave in at first, but immediately regretted his cravenness. That night he called for the orthodox senator Tatian and secretly installed him. Candidus tells us that in the morning when he discovered what had taken place, Aspar was so angry that he marched into Leo's apartments and grasped the emperor by his robes and told him it was not fit for their wearer to tell lies. Leo is alleged to have responded: "It is not fitting that an emperor should be bound to do the bidding of any of his subjects, especially when by his compliance he injures the state."

This last comment undoubtedly referred to the concerns of many courtiers at the dominance of the German faction, of which Aspar was the most distinguished figure. Leo, determined to curb this dangerous Teutonic element in the court, resolved on a policy of purging the army of Germans and reconstructing it around a core of Isaurians. These were the hardy mountain people who lived in the wild region of the Taurus, south of Iconium in Anatolia. Although because of where they lived they were Roman citizens, the Isaurians were generally regarded as half-savage, more barbarian even than the Germans, and their antecedents had often formed the core of pirates who plagued the eastern Mediterranean at the time of Pompey the Great in the first

century BC. Leo also organized a new elite corps of three hundred Romanized Thracians for his imperial guard. These he called the *excubitorii* (sentinels), and they were additional to the *scholae*, who had by this time become a largely decorative ceremonial guard.

Aspar fought to preserve the status quo and inevitably attitudes between the two factions hardened. Yet despite this thirteen-year-long breach between the emperor and his First Patrician, Aspar remained a great power. To the hopes of his supporters and the fear of his enemies, it seemed likely that sonless Leo's successor would be found among Aspar's sons: Ardabur, Patricius, or Hermenric. On the emperor's side the leading influence was that of an Isaurian chieftain, whose barbarous name was Tarasicodissa Rusumbladeotus, but which became conveniently changed to Zeno when he married Leo's daughter Ariadne. This honor indicated that Zeno was the head of the anti-Aspar party and that—after Ariadne gave birth to the younger Leo—he would secure the succession either for himself or his son.

A Bungled Invasion of Africa

Aspar also had powerful adherents, chief among them was Basiliscus, the brother of the emperor's wife Verina. Some orthodox sources claim he was of barbarous birth, but contemporary—and orthodox—Priscus is surely a better observer in describing Basiliscus as a Hellenized, well-educated Roman. The contrast between Aspar and Basiliscus was extreme: one the greatest generals of his time, an ill-educated barbarian who enjoyed the company of “actors and jugglers,” a convinced Arian; the other a fanatical monophysite and a man unfitted for leadership of any kind. But these two religiously opposed men found common cause against the Isaurians, and it was evident that in their desperate battle to have the edicts of the Council of Chalcedon overturned, the monophysite faction in Constantinople was even prepared to recruit Arians to their cause. However, even his friends laughed behind Basiliscus's back at his passionate and ill-concealed craving to wear his brother-in-law's imperial diadem. So when these points are considered, it seems astonishing that Leo—that man of common sense—should allow himself to be persuaded by his wife to put Basiliscus in command of the long-overdue war against Gaiseric and the Vandal kingdom; but that is precisely what he did.

Thirteen years had passed since Gaiseric's sack of Rome, during which time—apart from Majorian's ill-starred invasion attempt in 461—the empire had not raised a hand against him. The West, almost on the point of collapse, was in no position to accomplish anything, but the East's tardiness seems harder to defend. Apologists of Marcian, among them the historian Procopius in his *De Bello Vandalico*, excused his inertia by claiming he had made a pact with the Vandal king after the Roman defeat under Aspar in the campaign of 432. Gathered in a courtyard awaiting news of their fate, the captured soldiers sat down in the blistering noonday sun:

...but one among them, who was named Marcian, carelessly composed himself to sleep; and while he lay there an eagle, with outspread wings, hovered over him, now rising, now falling, but always contriving to shelter him, and him only, from the sun by the shadow of her wings.

Gaiseric observed this omen from the window of an upper room and interpreted it as meaning that Marcian would one day become emperor. Summoning the young man into his presence, he offered to release him in return for a pledge never to take up arms against the Vandal kingdom, Marcian had agreed, and kept his promise. While it is a nice story, Marcian needed no miracles to excuse staying his hand

—coping with the Huns and then recovering the finances of the Eastern empire had fully occupied him. Leo's common-sense attitude had furthered the delay in dealing out revenge, and his early prudence was rewarded with the release in 462 of the empress Eudoxia and her daughter Galla Placidia the Younger; her second daughter, Eudocia, had to remain behind, since she was married to Gaiseric's son Huneric.

In the West, Ricimer's puppet emperor Severus had died, giving Leo the opportunity to mend fences by suggesting Anthemius, Marcian's son-in-law, as his successor. When Ricimer agreed to this solution in 467, the way was paved for both halves of the empire to combine against Gaiseric. The greater weight of expense and resources fell on the comparatively unexhausted empire of the East, with Anthemius probably contributing only a small number of men. The campaign was greeted with universal joy—heightened by news of Gaiseric's persecutions of orthodox Christians—and Leo mounted it on a vast scale. We are told that a thousand ships, a hundred thousand men, and a hundred and thirty thousand pounds of gold were amassed in Constantinople. The combined naval and military force was more than enough to wipe out the Vandal nation. That it did not do so was entirely the fault of the supremely incompetent Basiliscus.

The sole source for the campaign of the spring of 468 is Procopius. Although writing some sixty-five years later, his account is probably reliable because he accompanied Belisarius's campaign against Carthage that began in 533 and succeeded where Basiliscus failed. The war started promisingly, with Marcellinus, the lord of virtually independent Dalmatia, driving the Vandals from Sardinia, while a Byzantine general named Heraclius landed a small diversionary force in Tripolitania and advanced on Carthage from the southeast. Thus Basiliscus was able to land his main force on the North African coast at Mercurion, site of an old temple to Mercurius (Hermes), close to the town of Neapolis (Nabeul) on the south of Capo Hermaeum (Cap Bon), without resistance. This put him, undetected, barely thirty-five miles from Carthage and—more importantly—between Gaiseric and the city. With Gaiseric occupied by the Byzantine diversionary detachment, Basiliscus was in an advantageous position to march directly on the Vandal capital and take his enemy by surprise. But he did no such thing. Instead, he made camp near his beach head and settled down. Procopius attributed this negligence to either cowardice or treachery. Later generations believed that Basiliscus was in the pay

of Aspar and under orders not to press his Arian fellow-believers too hard. Human stupidity seems a better explanation. Gaiseric seized the opportunity to send Basiliscus envoys to say that he would do everything Leo wanted of him. He requested only five days' grace to make preparation for surrender.

Even a half-better general with a smattering of military history would have instantly rejected this mild-mannered approach from the fierce Vandal king, but not Basiliscus. Overjoyed at what appeared to be a bloodless victory, he was happy to agree. And then, using the time so cheaply purchased, Gaiseric organized a fire-ship fleet, and on the fifth day sailed it into the harbor at Mercurion. The Vandal sailors set their fires and released the blazing hulks into the densely packed Roman ships. As the fire advanced the Romans were thrown into confusion and the Vandals began ramming vessels and capturing any sailors who tried to escape. On land, the story was repeated.

[35. Link to: Byzantium Emerging](#)

[Family Tree: Eastern & Western Emperors](#)

Purging the Germans

The Roman defeat was complete and Basiliscus, who had fled the battlefield at an early stage, returned in disgrace to Constantinople. The rage of the people at his disastrous failure was so great that he sought refuge in St. Sophia, and only his sister Verina's entreaties to Leo saved him from certain execution. As the campaign's architect, Aspar found himself held in equal odium, and the rumors began circulating that he was in treacherous alliance with his fellow Arian. The gossip had no effect on his unassailable position, however, for within two years he persuaded Leo to betroth his younger daughter Leontia to his own second son Patricius (who was susceptible to conversion to orthodoxy), and proclaim the young man Caesar. And this occurred despite Aspar and his sons' involvement in a plot in 469 to kill Zeno, which almost succeeded. Matters finally came to a head in 471 after Aspar's elder son, Ardabur the Younger, was discovered intriguing with the Isaurian faction in an attempt to win its members over to his father's side. Leo stayed his hand no longer and his *excubitorii* unsheathed their swords and cut down Aspar and Ardabur; Patricius was wounded, but may have recovered.

Given the divisions of the Byzantine court, it is hardly surprising that many thought the murders unjustifiable, and Leo earned the epithet *macellus* (the butcher), a term derived from the meat-markets of Rome. It was, perhaps, an unfair nickname for an emperor who had, in comparison to the many who had sat the thrones of Rome and Constantinople, little blood on his hands, and who was a just and merciful ruler of his people. One engaging story involves the hermit Daniel the Stylite (409–93). On a visit to Simeon Stylites in Antioch, Daniel had determined to adopt this strange form of penitential asceticism—which involved the hermit in living on top of a wooden or stone column. Returning to Constantinople, he erected his own pillar of modest height and lived on its top for some time. Leo was so impressed by Daniel's piety that at his own expense he had a much taller double-pillar erected for him. In order not to break his vow of touching the ground, Daniel crossed from one to the other over a makeshift bridge of planks. When he died he had remained aloft for a total of thirty-three years and three months. He did, however, come down to earth on one occasion, which is related in the following section.

With Aspar gone, there was a general purge of the Germanic element of the court and Leo completed his reconstruction of the

army, almost no one happy to have Arians under arms. This was of benefit to the Isaurians and Zeno particularly, who now took an increasingly heavy hand in the government as his septuagenarian father-in-law's health began to fail him. By the same token, Verina's influence held more sway, and it was no doubt at her insistence that Julius Nepos, nephew by birth of Marcellinus of Dalmatia who had temporarily swept the Vandals from Sardinia, and by marriage nephew of the empress, be made the next Western emperor on the death of the incumbent, Glycerius. in the summer of 473. The new emperor was proclaimed in Constantinople in August of that year, but concerns over Leo's rapidly deteriorating health delayed his departure for Italy until the following spring. In September the emperor surprised his court by naming his heir, certainly not the ludicrous Basiliscus but neither the expectant Zeno. Leo instead nominated his seven-year old grandson, whom Zeno had named Leo after his grandfather. Five months later, Leo died on January 18, 474, aged about seventy-three.

Leo II

Flavius Leo

*[Caesar October 25, 473; Augustus East January 18 to November 17,
474]*

Zeno

Tarasiodissa (Trascalissaeus) Rusumbladeotus

*[Co-Augustus East February 9, 474;
sole November 17, 474 to November 475, deposed;
restored July 477 to April 9, 491]*

Basiliscus

[Augustus East November 475 to July 477]

No indication is left to tell us whether Leo I passed over Zeno because of personal animosity, or his feeling that no Isaurian was fit to rule, or whether he simply wanted to pass on the succession to one of his own line, however partly diluted by Isaurian blood. In the event, it hardly matters. Young Leo's mother Ariadne instructed the child to crown his father co-Augustus at the moment he came to make his formal obeisance, which happened on February 9. Perhaps she was gifted with foresight—ten months later Leo II lay on his funeral bier, dead of natural causes, leaving Zeno the sole ruler of the Eastern empire.

Zeno began his untrammelled reign well by deciding to cut any further expenditure in warring against the Vandals. For a mission of peace to Gaiseric he appointed a distinguished senator called Severus, and gave him the rank of patrician to underline the importance of his embassy. It was a wise choice because the moderation, unselfishness and sense of fair-play of venerable Severus won over Gaiseric's barbarian heart. Yet the embassy almost foundered before it started as a result of a Vandal raid on the Epirote city of Nicopolis. Gaiseric explained this away by telling Severus that attacks such as this were only his way of telling Zeno he was still at war with the empire. And yet within a short space of time Severus persuaded the Vandal king to make peace and set free all the Roman prisoners in bondage. Gaiseric liberated all those prisoners in his own and his sons' keeping, and interceded with his chief nobles to arrange reasonable ransoms for those Romans in their hands. On his return to Constantinople, Severus sold off all his valuables to help raise the price for as many prisoners as he could manage.

And so in 475, the same year Orestes in Italy concluded his treaty

with Gaiseric, peace finally existed between Romans and Vandals. Unfortunately, for Zeno this auspicious start was the best part of his reign. His main headache was caused by the Isaurians; never much liked in Constantinople, their recently objectionable behavior had made them universally unpopular. Arrogant, rowdy, and frequently violent, their actions reflected badly on their most distinguished representative, the emperor himself. And Zeno harbored two enemies in his own household: the dowager-empress Verina, and her brother Basiliscus. Although their goals were identical, their objectives were not. Basiliscus had kept his head down since the Carthaginian debacle, but this had not dampened his ardor for the imperial diadem. Verina, on the other hand, wanted it for her newly acquired lover Patricius, an ex-praetorian prefect and the *magister officiorum* (and not the son of Aspar). Despite the divergence of their ambitions, Verina and Basiliscus joined forces to conspire against Zeno, and in this they were greatly aided by Illus, an Isaurian general who had turned against his benefactor and roused the sympathies of the Isaurian officers and soldiers. No reason for this change of loyalty is given, but it would not be hard to imagine that affection among the senior officers for their fellow Isaurian had been weakened by his pretensions as emperor. In return there was a cooling of the emperor's temper toward those who were staining his reputation with their drunken antics. In November 475, by means of a bluff that seems too obvious to be credible, Verina persuaded Zeno that the army, senate, and people were united against him, and he must flee the city immediately. Amazingly, he gave no thought to any defense, and the same night slipped away with his wife and mother to hide away in his native Isauria.

Since only Verina supported the cause of Patricius, Basiliscus was proclaimed emperor and rapidly showed himself to be every bit as useless a ruler as he had been a general. First he ordered—or allowed—the slaughter of every Isaurian in Constantinople. The bloodshed did little to shore up his hopeless position, entirely the creation of his own stupidity. He lost his sister's sympathy by having Patricius executed, earned the hatred of the populace through vicious taxation, and incurred the wrath of the Church by openly expressing his monophysite opinions and attempting to enforce them. The former bishop of Alexandria, known as Timotheus Ailouros (the suitably nicknamed “Weasel”), a staunch monophysite and ally of the emperor, had been expelled from his see in 460 after the Council of Chalcedon. Basiliscus now reinstated him. Timotheus insisted that Basiliscus abrogate the decrees of Chalcedon and abolish the patriarchate of

Constantinople. According to the contemporary chronicles Basiliscus was only dissuaded from obeying these extraordinary demands by the astonishing arrival on the ground of Daniel, the city's famous stylite. He descended from his pillar for the first (and only) time in fifteen years to intercede by haranguing the emperor and terrifying him into withdrawing his edict.

As if to indicate that even the heavens wanted Basiliscus gone, a massive fire broke out in the city in 476—the same year the Teuton warriors who had sworn to protect the Western Roman empire possessed it for their own. Among the tragic losses were Julian's library, said to contain a hundred and twenty thousand books, and the Palace of Lausus with its irreplaceable collection of antiques. At this point Illus, disgusted by the man he had helped to the throne, made overtures to Zeno to restore him to the purple. Verina also conspired against her brother, siding with Illus and raising funds in his cause (but presumably not understanding that this would serve Zeno). Basiliscus's position completely collapsed as a result of his nephew Harmatius's simple-minded treachery. The well-known dandy was promoted by his uncle to the rank of *magister militum*, and he dressed the part by appearing in the hippodrome as the Greek hero Achilles. Basiliscus dispatched him with an army to seek out Zeno and Illus who, reconciled to each other, had joined forces. We will never know whether the foppish Harmatius could actually fight, for he was easily persuaded by Zeno to negotiate, and happily turned against his uncle in return for a promise of the praetorian office of *magister praesentalis* for himself and the rank of Caesar for his son.

Unrest in Zeno's Second Reign

And so, in July 477, Zeno returned to Constantinople unopposed. Basiliscus, who had for the second time hidden away in St. Sophia, came out when he was promised his life. Zeno then banished him and his family to a wild region of Cappadocia, where—as probably intended—they perished for lack of food in the bitter winter. Verina had sought refuge in a church in Blachernae, but her nephew Harmatius came to her rescue, and she was saved; a clemency Zeno would come to regret bitterly. As to matters abroad, much had changed in his absence. The events that had led to the proclamation of the boy-emperor Romulus Augustulus, his overthrow, and the seizure of Italy by Odoacer were irrelevant to Zeno, who was far more inclined to object strongly to the earlier dethronement of his own nominated co-Augustus, Julius Nepos. Nevertheless, it appears that he diplomatically washed his hands when Nepos wrote to congratulate him on his restoration to the purple and asked for Zeno's support in effecting a similar restoration to the Western throne for himself. For when Odoacer's envoys arrived in Constantinople requesting the title of Patrician for their king, Zeno pointed out that Nepos was the Western emperor, and their request should be directed to him in Dalmatia. However, he signed the letter prepared to go back with the envoys which had been addressed “to the Patrician Odoacer”—a purposeful slip that indirectly gave recognition or a silly clerical error?

Nepos was not to receive the backing he craved, Zeno still had too many internal matters to settle. First among these was Harmatius, whose silly posturing pointed to a break down in his sanity. Zeno appears to have suffered a crisis of conscience about this, but the outcome was never really in doubt. A suitable assassin was found—an Ostrogoth who was still in imperial service named Onoulf, and who happened to be Odoacer's brother—and Harmatius was swiftly dispatched. His son, named Basiliscus like his great-uncle, was spared. Zeno stripped him of his rank and title of Caesar and forced him into the Church. Since young Basiliscus later served in the imperial palace at Blachernae and ended his life as the bishop of Cyzicus, he may well have been much happier as a *privatus* than saddled with imperial burdens.

Having recovered from her fright at Zeno's return, Verina now turned her fury against her former co-conspirator Illus, who was by then serving as *magister officiorum*. An attempt was made on his life in

477, in which her hand was suspected, but never proved. However, in the following year, when Illus was consul and stationed in Isauria, another plot against his life was uncovered, and the assassin proven to be in the employ of Epinicus, one of Verina's officials. Illus was naturally reluctant to return to Constantinople unless Verina was removed. Zeno concurred, and sent her to a convent in Tarsus, from which she was later moved to Dalisandus, and then Cherreus in Isauria, where she was incarcerated. But even at this distance, the empress was still able to cause trouble for Zeno and Illus.

In 479 the emperor faced another insurrection, this time headed by Marcian, grandson of his imperial namesake, son of the Western emperor Anthemius and husband of Leontia, younger daughter of Leo I. (She had been betrothed to Aspar's son Patricius, but this was broken off after Aspar's fall.) Marcian had two reasons to stage a coup: the treatment of his mother-in-law Verina; and his claim that his wife, having been born in the purple, was of higher rank than her older sister Ariadne, Zeno's wife, who was born before the emperor Marcian had been elevated. In company with his brothers Procopius and Romulus, Marcian's forces stormed the palace and nearly succeeded in overthrowing Zeno. Only swift action by Illus, who brought a unit of Isaurian troops across the Bosphorus under the cover of night and took the rebels by surprise, saved Zeno's throne. Marcian was treated with clemency and sent into exile as a monk in Cappadocian Caesarea, from where he escaped and raised a second rebellion, but this also failed. Still unwilling to execute him, Zeno had Marcian ordained a presbyter, and sent his wife Leontia into a convent.

But the *magister officiorum*'s problems were not over. In 482, while attending races at the hippodrome, an imperial life guardsman named either Spanicus or Sporacius attacked him. His own bodyguard managed to deflect the blow away from Illus, but the sword sliced through his right ear. The person behind this thwarted attempt turned out to be none other than the empress Ariadne, her motives perhaps being revenge for the treatment of her mother and sister. Events now rapidly moved toward the inevitable break between Illus and the emperor; it is unclear from the confused sources, but Illus had every reason in his own mind to suspect that Zeno was, if not conspiring against him, at least turning a blind eye to his possible assassination. Illus prudently took himself away from the court and retired to Anatolia, but this coincided with the rebellion of a certain Leontius. Again, the fragmentary sources make a degree of guesswork necessary

to order any form of history. It seems that messengers rode after Illus carrying orders for him to take command of the Eastern armies and restore calm. Somewhat reassured by this trust placed in him by the emperor, Illus hastened to Syria, where he discovered none other than Zeno's incompetent brother Longinus in charge. The profligate Longinus was not amused to find his authority compromised and an argument ensued, in which Illus had him arrested and thrown into prison.

If this was a high-handed reaction, Zeno's was the more ill-judged. When news of his brother's arrest reached Constantinople, the emperor pronounced Illus a public enemy and ordered the confiscation of his properties. This inevitably drove Illus into the rebel's camp. He made common cause with Leontius, and the two of them released the empress Verina from her imprisonment at Cherreus. This fortress was also known by the name of its builder, a by then dead robber-baron named Papirius. In return for her freedom, she was happy to crown Leontius at Tarsus, and then they went to Antioch, where on June 27, 484, Leontius established a rival court...or so goes one version. Another places a very different emphasis on the events. According to the alternative version Leontius, probably an Isaurian (though origins in Syria and Thracia also appear), who had a successful military career, was sent by Zeno against Illus, who had gone into Anatolia in revolt and seized the emperor's brother Longinus as a hostage. However, Illus persuaded Leontius to desert Zeno, and then declared him Augustus on July 19 at Tarsus, with the support of Verina. Antioch was occupied for twelve days (July 27 to August 8), during which time Leontius minted a few coins.

Regardless of which of these is to be believed (and a yet third version claims that Illus proclaimed the ordained Marcian emperor, not Leontius) the later events are generally clear. Illus and Leontius seemed content to remain where they were—probably for many weeks rather than the twelve days—which gave Zeno time to mount a second expedition. This included a young barbarian named Theodoric, prince of the Ostrogoths, under the overall command of Ioannes the Scythian (sometimes called John the Goth). The rebels were rapidly evicted from Antioch and chased to Papirius in Isauria, where they were besieged for four years, and where Verina died unlamented. In 488 the fortress was betrayed, probably by the false promise of a pardon, and the rebels were all executed. The heads of Leontius and Illus were sent to Constantinople, there to be impaled above the city walls. Of

Theodoric, who did not take part in the siege because of important occupations elsewhere, much more will be heard in the following chapter.

Schism Between the Two Churches

The monophysite controversy continued to dog Zeno, and he never managed to solve it. A little before the events recounted immediately above, in 482 the emperor together with Patriarch Acacius attempted to heal the breach between the dangerously disaffected monophysite eastern provinces and the Church through an edict known as the Act of Union, or *Henoticon*. It sought to mend the differences by affirming that Christ was both God and Man, but it conspicuously avoided the delicate word “nature.” As a compromise it was unsuccessful, predictably arousing the ire of all parties. In Rome, Pope Simplicius (468–83) and his successor Felix III (483–92) were particularly outraged. After the monophysite Alexandrian bishop Timotheus Ailouros, mentioned above, had been expelled from his see, Constantinople had installed the orthodox Timotheus Solophaciolus. But, as has been related, Basiliscus returned Ailouros to the see in 475, to which he adhered until his death in 477. At this point there were two contenders, the orthodox John Talaia and the monophysite Peter Mongos (the “Stammerer”), but amid the bickering Solophaciolus was given the vacant see, which he held until his death 481.

For years Zeno had held Talaia in esteem, but for some reason Patriarch Acacius hated him. When the Alexandrian Catholics elected Talaia to the see, he announced his succession to Rome and Antioch, according to custom, but he sent no message to Acacius in Constantinople. Instead, he wrote to Illus, who had befriended him at court, but Illus was in Antioch and so word of mouth reached Constantinople before the announcement arrived. The patriarch seized his chance to poison Zeno against Talaia, championing instead Mongos. In the following year the unimpeachably orthodox Talaia refused to sign the *Henoticon*, whereas politically astute Mongos said he would. Zeno ordered Talaia expelled from Alexandria and replaced him with Peter Mongos. Talaia now fled to Rome and made his case to Pope Felix, who defended his rights to Acacius and refused to accept Mongos. Stubborn Acacius refused to accede to the pope’s demands, and at a synod held in Rome in 484 Felix excommunicated the patriarch. So the story goes, there was no orthodox ecclesiastic courageous enough to read out the papal proclamation, so instead it was written out on a scrap of parchment and pinned to the back of the patriarch’s cope when he was not looking, during a service in St. Sophia. When he discovered it a few minutes later, the fuming Acacius instantly excommunicated Felix in turn. This action declared that

Constantinople now stood at the same hierarchical level as Rome, and the open schism between the two Churches was to last for thirty-five years. It was not the outcome that fumbling Zeno had hoped for.

By the end of the decade Zeno was failing mentally and physically. His second son was already dead, worn out by a life of homosexual excess and the ravages of venereal disease. Much of the government was in the hands of Zeno's brother Longinus, rescued from Illus in 484, who was in his second consulship in 490. He no doubt anticipated his natural succession, but events transpired differently when Zeno took counsel from the well-known soothsayer Maurianus and was told, in typically oblique fashion, that Longinus would not succeed. "Your successors," Maurianus intoned, "shall be your wife and one who has served as a *silentarius*." The *silentarii* formed an elite corps of thirty picked officials whose duty was to watch over the emperor's private apartments to ensure he enjoyed undisturbed sleep. This somewhat mundane-sounding task disguised a very competent body of men, who ranked with senators and carried out many administrative and confidential tasks, including writing the official imperial history. Quite why Zeno picked out one among the thirty, an eminent statesman named Pelagius, as the *silentarius* of the prophesy is not known. Perhaps to the emperor's senile mind, the rebukes he had received from Pelagius over his misgovernment, and his sturdy resistance to Zeno making Longinus Caesar, were sufficient to condemn him.

The unfortunate Pelagius was given no chance to defend himself. His property was confiscated, he was thrown into prison, and soon after strangled to death. It was a mistake. Pelagius had been widely respected and well liked, and this arbitrary cruelty cost Zeno any last dregs of popular affection. Thus he died without lamentation on April 9, 491 after an epileptic seizure, and the prophecy of Maurianus came true. When the mob greeted the widowed empress Ariadne with cries to give them a real emperor, an orthodox emperor, a Roman emperor! their meaning was obvious: no more Isaurians and no more heretics. Ariadne did as she was asked, and bestowed the diadem, as well as her hand in marriage, to one Flavius Anastasius, a native of Dyrrachium, in his early sixties...and one of the college of *silentarii*.

[Augustus East April 11, 491 to July 9, 518]

Anastasius was born at Dyrrachium on the Adriatic coast opposite Brundisium in 430. He was given the cognomen Dicorus (“two pupils”) because his eyes were differently colored: one blue one and one black one—a peculiarity which apparently only enhanced his handsome appearance. Anastasius had not been prominent at Zeno’s court beyond gaining the position of a *silentarius*, but he had earned a reputation for honesty and uprightness. This was so well known in Constantinople that when the sixty-one-year-old emperor appeared for the first time wearing the purple and diadem the people acclaimed him with the cry, “Reign, Anastasius, as you have lived!”

His accession and then his marriage to Ariadne on April 20 were marred by a rebellion caused partly by the oppressive conduct of an unpopular prefect and partly by disaffected Isaurians. Anastasius ordered the latter banished from the city, but they lingered around the nucleus of the Longinus faction. Stronger action was demanded, and Longinus was compelled to enter the priesthood and banished to Thebes (the sources do not make clear whether this was in Egypt or Boeotia), where after eight years he perished of hunger. His wife, daughter, and mother Lalis were sent to Brochti, a small oratory on the Bithynian shore, where for the remainder of their lives they existed on alms. Zeno’s property was confiscated and everything, even his imperial robe, sold for the benefit of the *fiscus*. This sale illuminates an aspect of the generally wise and peaceable Anastasius: he was obsessively mean when it came to money. As a consequence, Constantinople became a dull place to live, a city where puritanism ruled—although not necessarily peace. The emperor immediately began a program of cutting down on imperial expenditure, and so by the end of his long reign of twenty-seven years, the treasury was richer by three hundred and twenty thousand pounds of gold than it had been on his accession. This figure, quoted by Procopius, compares interestingly with his estimate for the cost of Leo I’s ill-fated African expedition of 468: a hundred and thirty thousand pounds.

Although the Isaurians’ expulsion restored a temporary order in the capital, in their native province they continued the rebellion until 496, largely unchecked by the ineffectual forces sent against them. When a charge of feebleness was laid at his feet, a war-weary Anastasius considered his options, and chose to take a strong stance.

With renewed energy, the imperial army prosecuted a bolder war and achieved complete victory by 498. The rebellion's leaders were decapitated and their heads sent to Constantinople to be displayed, "a sweet sight to the Byzantines." In the remainder of his reign, there was generally peace among his provincial subjects but many external threats. In 502 Kavadh (Cabades), king of Persia, broke the sixty-year-long peace, and invaded. In a four-year war that lasted until 505 several important Roman strongholds along the eastern frontier were lost, and hostilities only ceased when the Persians were promised a renewal of tribute. To the north, invasions of newly arrived Bulgars into Thraciae became endemic. Eventually, Anastasius was obliged to build a great wall across the thirty miles from Selymbria (Silivri) on the Propontis (Sea of Marmara) to the coast of the Black Sea to keep them away from the capital.

Perhaps the most dangerous threat to Anastasius was the insurrection of Vitalian. Although the son of an imperial army officer, Vitalian was of Gothic extraction; small in stature, he possessed all the fire and courage to lead a band of barbarians and mutineers. Vitalian championed a cause for which he can have had little real sympathy, that of the Chalcedonians. But it was a good pretext for rebellion against the emperor, whose monophysite leanings were never hidden. His real reason was less noble and stemmed from a grievance concerning his removal from the office of distributor of rations to the *foederati*. The mutinous soldiers alleged that they had been refused payment of arrears, and the Huns who made up the bulk of Vitalian's rag-tag army—well, they needed no excuse for rapine and pillage. Although Vitalian's ravaging took place mostly in the region of Odessus (Varna), he succeeded on three occasions in reaching the suburbs of Constantinople by sailing a fleet from the Black Sea into the Bosphorus. After the rebels retired from the second of these attacks in 514, Anastasius dispatched an army of eighty thousand troops under the command of his nephew Hypatius to bring Vitalian to heel. Unfortunately, Hypatius was no great general and near Odessus Vitalian's Huns dealt the Romans a terrible blow from which only twenty thousand survived. Hypatius himself was captured and Anastasius forced to treat with Vitalian. The terms were humiliating: Vitalian was appointed *Magister Militum per Thraciae* and paid an enormous sum for Hypatius's ransom, and Anastasius was forced to promise the restoration of exiled Chalcedonian bishops.

However, the emperor's failure to keep this promise made Vitalian

feel insecure, and in 515 he made a third amphibious advance on the capital. This time the rebel fared badly. A rough Thracian soldier named Justin, who was the prefect in command of the *excubitorii*, the select Thracian imperial guard originally formed by Leo I, took the Byzantine navy into the center of Vitalian's fleet and struck such terror into the sailors that the rebels were scattered. On witnessing the collapse of the seaborne raid, Vitalian's land army dispersed and the arch-rebel troubled Anastasius no more. He was, however to remain a problem for the emperor's successor (see chapter seventeen).

The Blue and Green Battle

By contrast with the provinces, Constantinople was continually shaken by outbreaks of violent rioting, almost always over religious matters. At Anastasius's accession Patriarch Euphemius had raised objections to Anastasius's monophysite adherence, and refused him coronation unless he signed a declaration of orthodoxy, which Anastasius did without hesitation. Many viewed this as a sign that he was a man ready to sacrifice his principles for power, but Anastasius held only a sympathy for the heretical creed and believed he was a Chalcedonian at heart. Nevertheless, as his reign progressed the emperor showed a greater inclination toward monophysitism. At this time Constantinople was riven between two factions, the Blues and the Greens. These institutions, of course, originated from two of the several chariot-racing teams that dated back to before the beginnings of the imperial era. In the course of the passing decades, the two other teams—Reds and Whites—had disappeared and, while still supporting their respective charioteers on racing days, the two factions had long since expanded beyond the confines of the hippodrome and evolved into political parties.

There is an earlier hint at this development. In 456, the emperor Marcian heavily censured the Greens throughout the Eastern empire for railing at his patronage of the Blues. When they refused to desist in their jeering Marcian responded by banning the Greens from holding any administrative or public posts for three years. It is interesting to note that Chrysaphius—the chamberlain who had plotted to assassinate Attila—had patronized the Greens, and Marcian's favoritism of the Blues clearly had a political aspect to it.

At the time of Anastasius the political affiliation of the Blues tended toward the big landowners and the old Greco-Roman aristocracy, therefore orthodoxy, while the Greens were on the side of tradesmen and the civil service. Since many of the latter came from the eastern provinces where heresy was more widespread, the Greens gradually became associated with monophysitism. Although at first Anastasius tried to act impartially, his economic policies—which favored manufacturing industries over agrarian—and his leaning toward monophysitism drew him to the Greens. Throughout his reign, hostility between the two factions (or *demes*, as they had come to be known) increased, with many violent eruptions in the streets. In 510 the Greens attacked the Blues in the hippodrome, and in the ensuing fight the emperor's own illegitimate son was killed. Worse followed in

the next year and Anastasius was largely responsible for the disturbance. To the important refrain in the Byzantine liturgy of “Holy God, Holy and Mighty, Holy and Immortal” (the so-called *trisagion*) the monophysites added: “...who was crucified for us.” This emphasized their belief that it was not the man Jesus but God himself who died on the cross.

When the heretics were heard loudly chanting this in the Chapel of the Archangel, which stood within the palace walls, orthodox tempers were roused. But they boiled over when, on the following Sunday, the heretics defiantly shouted them during mass in St. Sophia. The orthodox congregation shouted back, and the service dissolved into chaos as fighting broke out. Anastasius should have acted impartially, but instead he laid the blame at the feet of Euphemius’s successor, the saintly Patriarch Macedonius II. The infuriated mob marched on the palace, threatening to remove the heretical emperor, and only Macedonius’s imprecations for peace saved the terrified Anastasius from being manhandled from his throne. But the lesson went unlearned. Macedonius was quietly exiled soon after and the heretical chant was heard again. On November 4, 512 the violence was renewed in St. Sophia, until the great basilica’s floor ran with the blood of dead and wounded. The fighting boiled over into the city and continued unabated for two full days before Anastasius acted. He went to the hippodrome and there, before twenty thousand of his angry subjects, offered to lay aside the imperial diadem and let them choose his successor; or, if they preferred, he would continue in office and solemnly promise to sin no more. The ploy worked; quiet returned.

The riots awakened in the emperor’s mind the question of succession. There is a most probably apocryphal, though charming, story related in the source known only as the *Anonymous Valesii* that toward the end of his life Anastasius became curious about which of his three nephews would succeed him. Hypatius, the son of one of his sisters, we have already met; the other two were the brothers Probus and Pompeius, who may have been the sons of his brother. Accordingly, the emperor invited all three to dine with him and had three couches made ready on which they could take their rest after the meal. Under the cushion of one couch he placed a slip of paper inscribed with the word *regnum*. Whichever nephew chose that particular couch would reign after him. On the face of it this was a foolproof plan, but it still failed. Hypatius chose one couch and the two brothers, who appear to have held somewhat incestuous feelings

for one another, chose to lie together on another. Sadly, the couch secretly marked by the emperor remained unoccupied, and Anastasius knew then that none of his nephews would succeed him.

Consequently, he conceived of another method of divination, based on the concept that since God had moved in mysterious ways with his nephews, so He might again. This time he determined that the first person to enter his bed-chamber the very next day should be the anointed one. This should certainly have been his chamberlain, but it chanced that the Justin who had so soundly routed Vitalian, came to report the carrying-out of certain of his emperor's orders. Anastasius bowed before the will of God and recognized his successor.

Justin's elevation to the purple was not as smooth as Anastasius might have hoped. When the emperor finally died, aged eighty-seven, after midnight on July 9, 518, his chief eunuch Amantius had his own preferred candidate for the throne, a certain Theocritus, and confided in Justin, giving him a sum of money with which to bribe the *excubitorii* to support him. This was clearly an error of judgment. Justin kept the money, and warned his men to be ready. The next morning, as the crowds began to gather in the hippodrome to hear of the senate's choice of successor, fighting broke out. The *excubitorii* were brought in to restore order and, apparently of their own accord, began calling on their *comes* to take up the imperial mantle. In time-honored tradition, Justin at first refused, but the senators, recognizing a put-up job when they saw one, added their voices to that of the soldiers, and Justin allowed himself to be persuaded.

The events of Justin's reign are related in chapter seventeen, and at this point, it is necessary to go back in time to the moment when Odoacer deposed Romulus Augustulus in Italy. In time, Odoacer's successors would have to deal with Justin's nephew, the real power behind the throne of Byzantium after the death of Anastasius—and his name was Justinian.

BARBARIANS IN ITALY

[AD 476–534]

Odoacer the Herulian

Flavius Odovacer

[Ruler Italy September 4, 476 to March 15, 493]

The schism between the Churches of East and West caused by Constantinople's acquiescence in the matter of the monophysite heresy was introduced in the previous chapter, and how it enraged the popes Simplicius and Felix III. What is interesting from the West's point of view is that Felix was allowed to summon a synod in 484 and was then free to excommunicate Patriarch Acacius. This suggests that, at least from the Church's perspective, not much had altered in Italy since Odoacer removed Romulus Augustulus and made himself de facto ruler of what was left of the Western Roman empire. Although this would be to underestimate how much the political situation had changed in respect of the traditional legality of the ruler, for the mass of people life went on as usual, and for the papacy the status of the Roman see was actually enhanced.

The abdication of young Romulus Augustulus early in September 476 is generally regarded as marking the end of the Roman empire in the West, although some historians have argued that this was not the case. Their position is that the empire was indivisible—whether it was ruled by one Augustus, or two, or even more, was a matter of administrative convenience. And since Odoacer still made a nodding acknowledgment to the ultimate sovereignty of the emperor in Constantinople, it meant that the German was ruling the West as the emperor's viceroy—and what in that was so different to previous situations? Italians for almost a century, it is true, had also grown used to seeing barbarian war lords, the Patricians, as the real power, so was Odoacer so very different? But Odoacer had caused a seminal change. Unlike his precursors Arbogast, Stilicho, Aëtius, and Ricimer, Odoacer wanted no Western puppet as a figurehead, and without the title of Augustus, no matter how hollow the title may have become in the recent decades, the symbol of imperial continuity had been banished. And although Odoacer was fobbed off by Zeno when he requested of the emperor the title of Patrician, he nevertheless appears to have been content with Zeno's diplomatic slip in addressing his

response to “the Patrician Odoacer.” Besides, the title Odoacer preferred was to use was *rex*—king.

It was in the city of Rome that the Augustan vacuum was felt most keenly. Even though emperors may with only a few exceptions have made their courts in Mediolanum or Ravenna in preference to Rome, the old capital sensed its decline in prestige without an imperial presence anywhere within the realm. Therefore, it seemed to follow naturally that the Romans would seek a representative to look up to, a figure who possessed prestige and offered the prospect of continuity. And so they turned to the figurehead who had replaced the *pontifex maximus*, the pope, and raised him up. Almost immediately, the papacy was offered extended temporal secular powers in addition to its ecclesiastical ones and the lavish ceremony normally only accorded to emperors. In the persons of Simplicius and Felix it is possible to see the medieval papacy of religious princes springing into existence.

Odoacer was the master of the Germanic Heruli and Sciri (Scythian) tribes, and these—as soldiers of Rome—were the men who had demanded Orestes give them one-third of Italy for their settlement. It is logical to assume that this donation was made, and that it probably affected the urban population very little, since the weight of loss must have fallen on the wealthy land-owning class, largely in the north. Indeed, for the great mass of Italians the old order of things hardly changed at all. What impoverished and almost always third-hand annals of the period survive, suggest that Odoacer employed the existing machinery of Roman government. No doubt the Teutonic subjects of the new ruler, living on Italian land assigned to them from their old possessors, adhered to their old tribal laws, but there is no indication that this became a barbarian land under the oppressing feet of German petty chieftains; indeed, the opposite. Roman administrators served Odoacer in all the major and traditional offices.

The names that have come down through time include Liberius (in an unknown function), Cassiodorus as a praetorian prefect, Peirius as *comes domesticorum*, and Pelagius as another praetorian prefect in Liguria. Justice was still administered according to Roman law, judged by Roman magistrates; taxes were still collected by the *rationales*; the administrative and courtly hierarchy introduced by Diocletian and perfected under Constantine continued to work for the benefit of the state. Only the center had changed, instead of an Augustus, there was

a barbarian chieftain who refused the imperial diadem, wore not the purple (indeed, he sent these symbols of Roman authority to Zeno), and paid only lip service to the traditional legitimacy of his rule.

That he had a care for all his subjects—arbitrary as it may have been in the Germanic mold, rather than steadfastly Roman—is illustrated by his treatment of Ticinum (Pavia), the city that had suffered most during the overthrow of Orestes. When its saintly bishop Epiphanius appealed to Odoacer to relieve the citizens of their unbearable tax burden levied by Pelagius to replenish the bankrupt exchequer, his wish was granted. Despite the city's penurious state, Epiphanius desired to rebuild the two great churches that had been destroyed in the mercenary revolt that made Odoacer master of Italy. On seeing the bishop's worthy efforts, Odoacer decreed that Ticinum should be exempted from tribute for five years. A similar degree of wisdom is to be found in his attitude toward the pope in Rome, and his dealings with and support for the papacy in its battle with see of Constantinople contributed greatly to the increased eminence of papal dignity.

A Back Turned on the Mediterranean

Odoacer made his capital at Ravenna, not because this was the capital of the last Roman emperors, but because it was conveniently close to the northern borders. The Mediterranean seems to have held little interest for him. Corsica and Sardinia were in Vandal hands, and he was content with the peace Orestes had established with Gaiseric. In a formal treaty, probably the last act of the aged Vandal king, all but the western part of Sicily around the town of Lilybaeum (Marsala) was ceded to Orestes, and thus in turn to Odoacer, in return for an annual tribute. Gaiseric went to the grave early in 477. It seems appropriate that the great scourge of Rome for more than fifty years should have expired only six months after the death of the Western empire, as though deprived of his ancient foe there remained no meaning to the Vandal king's life. It was soon apparent that the fearsome reputation of the Vandal nation was largely due to Gaiseric's destructive genius, for it rapidly declined under his son Huneric and grandson Hilderic, as indeed did Odoacer's willingness to continue paying tribute. Had Odoacer turned his attention across the Mediterranean with any serious intention, Italy might well have regained its African possessions, but he looked to the north instead.

Odoacer's dominions were almost unchanged from those of the Roman emperors of the West for the past twenty-five years. Gaul was lost to him, and the region comprised of Narbonensis II and Alpes Maritimae (Provence), Rome's first gained and last lost *provincia*, remained staunchly set against the barbarian king, and appealed to the East for protection. But as he had with the claim of Nepos, Zeno favored Odoacer's simultaneous embassy over that of the Provençals'. In the event, Odoacer never made them submit to his rule, preferring instead to make his claim over to Euric, king of the Visigoths, whose power in Gaul was predominant. To the north of the Alps the old Italian province of Raetia, lost to the last emperors, was firmly in Odoacer's hands, and from there he could expand to the north against the Alamanni and Thuringii, northwest toward the Burgundi, and east to the other side of the Adriatic. A pretext for this expansion came when Julius Nepos, who still held precariously onto Dalmatia, fell to the swords of the *comites* Ovida and Viator in 480. Technically, Dalmatia belonged to the Western empire—although its possession had switched several times—and so Odoacer could argue the legitimacy of an invasion to revenge the murder of his technical superior. In the following year he transported an army into the

province, conquered and slew Ovida (Viator appears to have already died), and added Dalmatia to his dominions.

Odoacer also took war into the region corresponding with Roman Noricum. This once densely populated and wealthy province had fallen on sad times, with its still largely Roman citizens falling prey to raids of Alamanni from the west and Thuringii from the northwest. The cities of Batavia Castra (Passau) and Noreia (Neumarkt in Styria) were attacked regularly, and their citizens carried off into slavery. The only semblance of government in the region was offered by the powerful monarchy of the Rugi, who occupied a territory north of the Danuvius. Their expansion into Noricum after 482 inevitably brought them close to Odoacer's borders. In 486, the Rugi made some movement against Odoacer, and he responded by invading in 487, carrying off prisoners to Ravenna and annexing the region (also making himself king of the Rugi). Frederick, the last prince of the Rugi, fled before the Gothic army commanded by Odoacer's brother Onoulf and sought refuge at the court of Theodoric, probably then residing at Novae (Sistova, Bulgaria). This insult to one who was certainly an Ostrogothic ally could certainly be seen as a *casus belli*, but Theodoric already had a more solid reason for his invasion of Italy.

Theodoric

Flavius Theodoricus

[*Ruler Italy March 15, 493 to August 30, 526*]

Born in about 454, Theodoric was the son of the Ostrogothic chieftain Theodemir and his concubine Erelieva. It was said that the day of his birth was the same as the Ostrogoths' great victory over the Huns, won by Theodemir's brother and joint-ruler Walamir, and that this omen boded well for the baby prince's future. However, within seven years this was looking less rosy. The annual tribute paid to the Ostrogoths had fallen into arrears under the emperor Leo, and they began to ravage Moesia. Leo recognized his error in ignoring his *foederati*, and made peace, promising to reinstate the tributes and pay the arrears in return for sureties of good behavior and the security of holding Theodemir's son hostage in Constantinople. For ten years, young Theodoric dwelt in the capital, where he appears to have benefited little from any formal education. He never learned to read or write, and was said to have used a golden stencil for signing his name, and even then his secretary had to guide his hand to ensure the ink was correctly applied. On the other hand, he gained tremendous insight into Byzantine politics. This served him well when, after successfully commanding an imperial conquest of the Sarmatae in 471, he succeeded his father in 474 as a leader of the Ostrogothic nation.

He was not alone, for another Theodoric, nicknamed Strabo ("Squinter"), challenged his position. Ten years of changing relationships between the two Ostrogoths, and between themselves and the emperor, ended with Strabo's death in 481, which left Theodoric in undisputed control. The main purpose of his early life was to secure a permanent home for his people, and in pursuit of this goal he spent twenty years engaged with the empire both on its behalf and fighting against it, employing all his skills in diplomacy, bargaining, arguing, threatening, and cajoling by turns. He assisted Zeno against Basiliscus in 477 and Illus in 484. He became a Patrician, a *magister militum* in 477 and an adopted son of the emperor, and then a consul in 484. Yet he was also responsible for devastating Epirus and Macedonia in 479, laying waste Thessalia in 482, and he even marched on Constantinople itself in 487.

This constant vacillation in his relations with Zeno profited neither side, and by about 487 the emperor and his prodigal adopted son accepted that some resolution was necessary. According to the

historian Procopius (the great chronicler of early Byzantium), the emperor, who was losing any sympathy he might have had for Odoacer, had the bright idea of sending Theodoric to Italy to retake it for the empire. Cassiodorus, chief minister to Theodoric and his chronicler, claimed it was the Ostrogoth's notion and that Zeno immediately saw the wisdom of such a suitable political settlement. Whoever was the campaign's real architect, at some point in late 487 or early 488, it was agreed between them that Theodoric should lead the entire Ostrogothic nation into Italy, overthrow Odoacer and rule the land as an Ostrogothic province-kingdom under imperial sovereignty.

The Gothic Conquest of Italy

Before tackling Italy, Theodoric had to get his people across Illyricum. Had this been a purely military expedition, the journey across the war-ravaged and mountainous land would have posed little real problem, but conservative estimates put the non-combatants traveling with him well in excess of two hundred thousand. Progress was no faster than the slowest laden wagon, and the train included pack animals, cattle and sheep, fodder, and the usual paraphernalia of an ancient army. Soon, the food began to run out, and pestilence followed them. At a point when it seemed most hard to continue, the Ostrogoths encountered the unconquered Gepidae, who barred the forward route. In a battle that took place in the vicinity where Constantine fought his first battle against Licinius in 314, the Ostrogoths were victorious. The capture of the Gepid provisions came only just in time for the starving women and children (less fortunate, of course, for the Gepids). Thus it was that in August 489, Theodoric crossed the Julian Alps like so many conquerors and usurpers before him and descended into Italy.

However, the war proved tougher than Theodoric had anticipated. Odoacer fought back fiercely, ranging his army to the east of ruined Aquileia, on the banks of the Isonzo. The battle of the same name took place on August 28. Despite owning all the advantages, Odoacer was overcome, and fled the field to take up position on the banks of the Athesis (Adige). The outcome of this second battle of September 30 was also an Ostrogothic victory. Many of the Heruli and Scyrii were slain, and their king hastily retreated to close himself up in Ravenna. Theodoric proceeded to Mediolanum and received the surrender of its garrison in October.

At this point it must have seemed to the Ostrogoths that they had all but succeeded in their mission, with only a mopping up campaign to pursue. But it was not to be so. Theodoric decided to place his faith in a surrendered Herulian commander named Tufa to organize the siege of Ravenna. This proved to be an unwise move, but in his defense it should be remembered that Theodoric knew little of the territory he was investing, and Ravenna, set in its spreading marshes, had a reputation as a treacherous place to attack. When Tufa began his blockade of the capital, Odoacer came out and persuaded his former subordinate to renew his allegiance. This Tufa did, even going so far as to hand over in chains several Ostrogothic nobles in his company to Odoacer. Their subsequent murder made even more bitter

the contest between the two foes.

This reverse placed Theodoric in a difficult position. Mediolanum was sprawling, its defenses were weak, and it was too close to Ravenna for comfort. The Ostrogoths, therefore, moved further west to Ticinum, better defended by its position in the crook of the Ticinus (Ticino) and Padus (Po) rivers. Here, Theodoric became acquainted with Bishop Epiphanius, and his good relations with the cleric did much to endear the Roman Church to the Ostrogoths. In the spring of 490, the appearance in Liguria of another contender tied up Theodoric's forces. This was Gundobad, king of the Burgundi, who had remained out of Italian politics for some sixteen years since his abandonment of Glycerius that had left the puppet emperor at the mercy of Julius Nepos. Gundobad feared that if Theodoric conquered Italy, he would turn on the Burgundi next.

However, a truce was arranged (which later ripened into an abiding friendship), and the Burgundi returned home. Unfortunately, as a consequence of this diversion, Odoacer issued forth from Ravenna and reoccupied much of the territory he had lost. By the time Theodoric was able to confront him again Herulian forces had assumed a threatening position around Ticinum. The Ostrogoths found themselves besieged, and only the timely arrival of a friendly Visigothic army averted disaster. Another battle was fought along the banks of the Addua (Adda), with great slaughter on both sides, and once again the Gothic cause prevailed.

In 491 Theodoric turned the tables and besieged Odoacer in Ravenna, where he was to remain penned in until February 25, 493. By this time, the state of the defenders was appalling, and stubborn Odoacer was forced to ask for an armistice. Theodoric agreed and John, bishop of Ravenna, arranged the terms, which included Odoacer's young son Thelane (sometimes given as Oclan) being handed over as a hostage.

On March 5 Theodoric triumphantly entered the city that was to become his home for the remaining thirty-three years of his life. Discussion of the settlement terms between the two Teutonic kings continued for several days, with a suggestion that Theodoric might even be prepared to share the throne. But this was certainly no part of the Ostrogoth's real plan. On the evening of March 15, 493, Theodoric invited Odoacer to a banquet. The Herulian king attended with his faithful *comitatus*, but was separated from them in order to take the guest of honor's seat. As he sat, two men came forward and knelt,

making some pretended request, and in so doing each clasped the king's arms. At this, soldiers—previously hidden in side alcoves—rushed up, raised their swords and prepared to strike, but the sight of the now silver-haired Odoacer, defenseless before them, stayed their hands. Greatly angered at this hesitancy, Theodoric himself strode forward, his own sword unsheathed, and struck such a trenchant blow that he sliced Odoacer from the collar-bone to the loins, crying out his vengeance for those Ostrogoths treacherously delivered by Tufa that the Herulian king had murdered. Theodoric, himself surprised by the force of his blow, laughed and said: "I think the wretch never had a bone in his body."

The members of Odoacer's *comitatus* were swiftly dealt with by Theodoric's surrounding guard, while his brother Onoulf was shot down by arrows and killed trying to flee the palace gardens. Odoacer's wife Sunigilda was imprisoned and later died of hunger, and Prince Thelane was sent to Visigothic Gaul, but later executed on the king's orders. In short, the Heruli-Scyrian line was wiped out, and Theodoric had accomplished his ambition. Unlike his predecessor, the Ostrogoth discarded the furs and skins of his Germanic heritage and donned the imperial purple. However, he kept his promise to Zeno, and ruled Italy as a Patrician and *magister militum praesentalis*, giving his allegiance to the emperor, and issuing coins in his own name but with the emperor's portrait on them. Within his own dominions, he styled himself *Rex Gothorum et Dux Italiae*, and at Ravenna he established a recognizably medieval monarch's court.

To the Italians, who greatly outnumbered the emigrant Ostrogoths and the conquered Teutons, Theodoric's reign brought peace and prosperity to a degree Italy had not seen for ninety years, since before the days of Alaric the Visigoth. They were allowed to live as they had done, on their estates and in their villages, towns and cities. Indeed, there is reason to suppose that no further Italian land was taken for the settlement of the Ostrogoths, since they simply dispossessed the Heruli. Romans were barred from taking military service, but received the civil service as their exclusive preserve, and so good Roman administration continued and even flowered.

Despite beginning in bloodshed, Theodoric's reign was also one of moderation, stained only by the imprisonment and brutal execution by slow garroting of the *magister officiorum* and philosopher Boethius in 524. His offense was to have defended his friend the ex-Consul Albinus, who had been wrongfully accused of treason. During the

course of his confinement, Boethius wrote *The Consolations of Philosophy*, which became so popular in succeeding centuries that it was even translated into Anglo-Saxon vernacular by Alfred the Great. Theodoric was said to have bitterly regretted this action to the end of his days. And when he died on August 30, 526, Italy lost the greatest of her early medieval rulers. Theodoric was interred in his great mausoleum at Ravenna, a half-barbaric, half-classical building that symbolized the life of a man who bestrode two civilizations, and attempted to bring unity to both.

[36. Link to: Ostrogoths in Italy](#)

Athalaric

Athalaricus

[Ruler Italy August 30, 526 to October 2, 534]

Shortly before his death Theodoric, who had no son to follow him, summoned the leading Gothic chieftains and presented to them his eight-year-old grandson Athalaric as their future king. This child was the son of Theodoric's only daughter, Amalasuntha, a woman remarkable not only for her time, but also as a Goth. She had received a classical education, spoke Latin and Greek fluently, and reveled in intellectual pursuits. She also possessed a love of power for its own sake, and displayed a ruthless ambition. When her father died, she automatically assumed her son's regency. Among her first acts, she assured the Romans they would continue to be well treated, and to prove her good intentions the confiscated properties of Boethius were restored to his children. This all boded well, but the male-dominated Gothic society frowned on her—as a ruler her gender was an affront, and the chieftains objected to having their king raised as a classical aesthete when he should be a rowdy warrior. Before a year had passed, a body of influential Gothic nobles insisted on taking Athalaric away from Amalasuntha's influence. It might be assumed that this meant his removal from the lap of luxury to a harsh regimen, but in fact it was the opposite. His mother's educational methods had been severe, and although the boy was immediately immersed in training to be a warrior-king, and given tough young male companions to accompany him, unfortunately in their lax and unbridled behavior, they led him into a life of drunken debauchery. Before he was even of an age to begin properly ruling, a life of dissipation killed him in his eighteenth year, on October 2, 534.

By Gothic default, the throne now passed to Theodahad, Theodoric's nephew and the last surviving male member of his line. For Amalasuntha, who had been dispossessed of her authority when Athalaric was removed from her sphere, this presented an opportunity. She had been considering her choices for some time, and had concluded that an alliance with her cousin was the obvious answer. Now here he was, unexpectedly given the crown by her son's demise. However, her future intentions must be placed on hold because from this point on the tale of the Gothic kings of Italy becomes inextricably entwined with that of the Eastern Roman empire. To understand, it is necessary to go back sixteen years in time and move to Constantinople and the events that transpired there

following the accession of Justin.

THE RECOVERY OF THE WEST

[AD 518–565]

Justin

[Augustus East July 9, 518 to August 1, 527]

Justin was born in about 452 in Dardania, a province of the diocese of Daciae. The region had suffered dreadfully at the hands of the Huns during the raids that reached as far south as Thermopylae in 447, and a decade later by the Ostrogoths. For the peasants living there life was harsh and short, and so at some moment during Leo I's reign three strapping Thracian peasant lads, tired of the constant struggle for existence, left home determined to better their lot in the imperial army. Zimarchus, Dityvistus, and Justin departed Bederiana, a village some sixty miles south of Naissus and, according to Procopius, they went "with their cloaks slung over their shoulders...and when they reached the city they had nothing more than the cooked biscuit that they had brought with them from home."

The man who was to step into Anastasius's worn shoes was, therefore, hardly imperial material. He never learned to read or write and, like Theodoric, required the use of a stencil to make his signature (though he was less grand, preferring good old wood to gold). Procopius sniffingly dismissed Justin by comparing him to a donkey "inclined to follow the man who pulls the rein, wagging his ears steadily the while." His wife, Lupicina, was of even humbler origin, a slave who had been the concubine of the man from whom he purchased her. Despite the poor opinion of Procopius, Justin—we hear nothing further of his two companions—had little trouble in taking service and advancing through the ranks. In this he was a beneficiary of Leo's newly organized corps of palace guards, the *excubitorii*, and when Anastasius died in 518 Justin had risen to become *comes excubitorum* in recognition of his defeat of Vitalian in 515.

As soon as the *silentarii* had assured themselves that the emperor had indeed expired they summoned the *Magister Officiorum* Celerianus (Celer), and Justin. Celer commanded the *scholae*, but they no longer had a military function; by comparison Justin's *excubitorii* were tough fighters and this put him in the pivotal position on the morning of July 9 already described at the conclusion of chapter fifteen. The only other possible claimants were Anastasius's three discarded nephews.

The brothers Probus and Pompeius seemed to have no stomach for a contest, and Hypatius—having been ransomed—had been posted to the eastern frontier as *magister militum* and was too far away to affect the fast-moving events in the capital.

Having been “persuaded” to accept the purple, Justin offered the troops a donative, the same amount that Leo I in 457 and Anastasius in 491 had distributed: five *nomismata* and one pound of silver to each soldier. *Nomismata* (sing. *nomisma*), is the Greek word for the Latin gold *solidus* struck at 72 to the Roman pound (4.48 gm). In the West became known as the *besant*, from Byzantine. Justin’s popularity with the army helped ensure his elevation, but the orthodox population of Constantinople also admired him, for he was a staunch Chalcedonian opposed to the Anastasian party with its monophysite leanings, and he openly championed the Blues against the highly unpopular Greens. The people also felt confident that he was the man to deal with Vitalian, who was still at liberty and causing trouble along the Illyrian Danube.

Vitalian was actually an embarrassment for Justin the Chalcedonian, because on the surface they were of the same religious party, championing the same cause: the ending of the schism between the Churches of East and West. The restoration of Vitalian to the office he had held before falling out with Anastasius was an indispensable part of any reconciliation with the see of Rome, even though on the grounds of piety he hardly deserved the pope’s championing his cause. Vitalian himself clearly held that, after the death of Anastasius, he also had a claim on the throne. He would have to be dealt with, but not until after Justin’s cherished aim of reconciling the Churches was accomplished. The credit for this most important achievement of Justin’s reign must go to his clever nephew Justinian, who guided his uncle in all things.

The regime swiftly moved to re-establish orthodoxy. On July 16, 518 Patriarch John, successor to Timotheus, bowed to the wishes of the people and pronounced anathema against Severus, the hated monophysite bishop of Alexandria. On August 1 Justin sent a letter to Pope Hormisdas (514–23), informing him of his accession—and, somewhat disingenuously, his unwillingness to accept the honor. This epistle was actually crafted by Justinian, whose talent for theological disputation had matured nicely at thirty-six. It took more than three months to reach Rome and the pope’s cordial reply was not returned until the next year. Hormisdas declined the invitation to go to

Constantinople in person, but he sent a delegation to set out Rome's non-negotiable position, which he made clear in his letter. The papal legates had been provided with an *indiculus*, instructions on how far they were to go in negotiation (hardly anywhere, since they had been forbidden to enter into debate), and a *libellus*, or formula of submission to be signed by all who wished reunion with the see of Rome.

The embassy arrived at Constantinople on March 25, 519, having been met outside the city by a glittering delegation headed by Justinian himself and a reluctantly restored, eager-eyed Vitalian. On the following day the legates presented their patents to the emperor. Patriarch John, who would not compromise his dignity by attending, like the pope sent his representatives, who pronounced the *libellus* true to the facts. At this, the impatient emperor and gathered senators demanded that John accede, which he did with some reluctance on March 28. As a consequence Acacius (whose excommunication had been pinned to his back), author of the *Henoticon*, was posthumously condemned as a heretic. He was joined by the names of Timothy the Weasel, Paul the Stammerer, and the emperors Zeno and Anastasius. Sadly, Hormisdas insisted on the damnation of the patriarchs Euphemius and Macedonius, neither of whom had veered from orthodoxy, and who had even suffered exile for their beliefs. The accord was an unconditional surrender for Constantinople, but it was a price Justinian was willing to pay for a reunited Church.

The emperor was hailed by his people as their *restitutor*, but Justin knew too well that his nephew had been the real architect of the reconciliation. For the remainder of his life, he was content to be Justinian's mouthpiece, and so it is the nephew and not the uncle who came to symbolize the glory of the new age.

[Co-Augustus April 4, 527; sole East (West) August 1, 527 to November 14, 565]

In 482 Justinian was born in the small hamlet of Tauresium, close to the birthplace of his uncle. After his own assumption of the purple, he was to rebuild his native village and rename it Justiniana Prima, modern Caricin Grad. His mother-tongue was undoubtedly Thracian, but the region had been Romanized for a long while and he probably spoke Latin from an early age but not Greek, the language by that time having barely impinged in Thracia. The date of his arrival in Constantinople—presumably at Justin's calling—is unrecorded, but he must have been still a child because, unlike his uncle, Justinian was extremely well educated. His grasp of affairs, his wide knowledge, and his culture could not have been acquired anywhere else but in the capital. At the time of Anastasius's death, he was a member of the *scholae*, but it seems that he had also been adopted by Justin as his son, at which point he dropped his given names of Flavius Petrus Sabbatius and became simply Justinian.

On his elevation, Justin raised his nephew to the rank of Patrician, and appointed him *comes domesticorum*, a position that gave him access to the highest levels of government. With the papacy and patriarchy once again unified in holy communion, there was no longer a need to put up with the insufferably stubborn Vitalian. Again, it was not the capable and affable soldier Justin who handled the matter, but wily Justinian. Vitalian had been persuaded to return to the capital in order to aid in negotiations with the papal embassy and, in typically Byzantine fashion, his suspicions were lulled by awarding him the rank of *magister militum*. He was further gulled with a consulship in 520, and while he was quietly gloating over his success, Justinian had him quietly assassinated in the palace. With him fell Celer of the *scholae*, not only a henchman but also, Justinian suspected, another potential trouble-maker with independent imperial ambition.

In the following year Justinian celebrated his own consulship with the most lavish games Constantinople had ever seen. After the parsimony of Anastasius the contrast was dramatic. The spectacle was intended to say to the world that the empire was poised on the threshold of a new golden age, united under God, whose representative on earth was a noble emperor who would restore its lost territories and recapture its prestige in the eyes of all men. Justin,

however, was an aged man approaching his seventies and it would be Justinian who would accomplish these noble goals.

Soon after 520 Justinian met his future empress—one of late antiquity's most famous women, although the supremely catty Procopius would have used the word “infamous” to describe Theodora. The historian reveled in her character-assassination in his *Anecdota*.

Procopius (c.490/510–c.560s) is the most important historian of late antiquity. Not only have his works survived mostly intact, but for the first time since the Severan dynasty, the empire had produced a writer of merit, enormous curiosity, and a talent for organizing and then telling the events he witnessed. He became the biographer of the great general Belisarius, and his accounts of the campaigns were variously grouped in *De Belli* (Wars). He wrote the “official” and revoltingly sycophantic *De Aedifici* (Buildings, a record of the marvels of Justinian's reconstruction program) and in his bitter later years *Anecdota* also known as *Historia Arcana* (Secret History). In keeping with most historians, Procopius wrote *Secret History* for posterity, but unlike them he wrote this volume *only* for posterity, because publication during his lifetime would have led to almost certain disgrace and death. He hated the emperor and empress, painting her as a shameless prostitute and he as a genocidal tyrant. In *Secret History* even his benefactor and patron Belisarius—so praised in *Wars*—comes off badly, his return to Italy in 544 being described as a personal quest for booty. It is a strange and, at points, borderline-pornographic work, never more so than when he deals with Theodora:

...although she made use of the three apertures in her body, she was wont to complain that Nature had not provided her with larger openings in her nipples, so that she might have contrived another form of intercourse there.

And he describes her nightly occupation:

Many a time she would attend a banquet with ten young men or more, all with a passion for fornication and at the peak of their powers, and would lie with all her companions the whole night long; and when she had reduced them all to exhaustion she would go to their attendants—sometimes as many as thirty of them—and copulate with each in turn; and even then she could not satisfy her lust.

A formidable lady indeed. Is there not just a hint of jealousy in the man who would, through his detailed chronicles, make Justinian's general Belisarius world famous?

Regardless of Procopius's lurid tales of Theodora's debauchery, she was certainly not the woman a future emperor was supposed to marry. She was one of three daughters of a bear-keeper named Acacius who was employed by the Greens at the hippodrome. His death left the family destitute and his widow, who was a professional dancer and actress, married another animal-keeper for whom she tried to retain her former husband's position. But when the Greens gave the job to another, the Blues were more accommodating. As a consequence, the young Theodora conceived an adoration of the Blues and an undying hatred of the Greens. While still a child she joined her elder sisters on the stage and developed into an accomplished mime and player of low comedy and farce. As Theodora grew into a beautiful young woman, she became one of the capital's most notorious courtesans, although surely not to the extent described by Procopius. At some point in her twenties she became the mistress of a civil servant and accompanied him to North Africa, where the two fell out. On her return journey—the fee earned, says Procopius, in the only way she knew; on her back—Theodora reached Alexandria, and spent some time there. It appears that she met with many churchmen and underwent a form of religious experience that altered her character, for when she finally returned to Constantinople she was not the same Theodora who had left it. She also brought with her a noticeable leaning toward Alexandrian monophysitism.

Theodora resumed her support of the Blues, and this is how she met Justinian. The beautiful woman, now in her thirties, immediately captivated him and he soon made her his mistress; then announced his intention to marry her. However, there were obstacles in his path. One was the law that forbade the marriage of senators to actresses; another was the opposition of the empress. Justin's low-born wife Lupicina had changed her name to Euphemia on his accession, but she retained her peasant attitude to one of baser extraction than herself, even though she was fond of her nephew, and supported him in most of his wishes. Against Theodora, however, she was implacable, and the marriage was impossible while she lived. But after Euphemia's death in 524, Justin was willing to clear the way. He issued a *novella* to extend the one formulated by the emperor Marcian. This allowed a contrite actress who abandoned her profession and recovered her pristine condition to marry whomsoever she chose. With the way clear, Justinian and Theodora were wed in due pomp by the patriarch in St. Sophia. Two years later, on 4 April 527, they were crowned jointly as co-Augustus and Augusta, and when Justin died on the first

day of August in the same year, they found themselves the sole rulers of the Eastern Roman empire.

Justinian's Law Reforms

For all that there were to be glorious achievements during Justinian's reign, it cannot be said that he was a popular ruler. This was partly his own fault in having the tax system streamlined in order to produce the funds necessary for his extravagance in building churches, and in placing in charge a most disliked man known as John of Cappadocia. In part it was because of his court's aloofness from the people, although this was much more due to the empress than the generally affable Justinian. Some care is required here, for it is again Procopius who speaks loudest in description. Her monophysite tendencies were distrusted; she was extravagant, where Justinian was personally frugal; he worked long, hard hours, she slept all afternoon, and then after a night's banqueting until late into the next morning; he was merciful, she delighted in cruelty; he was inclined to talk to anyone, even those of low state, while Theodora surrounded herself with unapproachable magnificence. But at Justinian's door must be laid blame for the great unrest that followed his abandonment of the Blues once he no longer required their political support, and which is related later in this section.

John of Cappadocia was an able administrator, despite a lack of formal education, and Justinian appointed him praetorian prefect in 531. In this capacity he made sweeping changes to the taxation system that fell on both rich and poor alike. He also did much to centralize the bureaucracy and reduce the powers of provincial officials. Unfortunately, although he was personally incorruptible, his morals were of a different standard, and matched his methods when he thought someone was hiding wealth from him. Suspects were frequently subjected to floggings or even torture; he was a glutton and a drunkard who, in his travels through the provinces "left behind not a single vessel of any kind; neither was there any wife, any virgin or any youth free of defilement."

Another of Justinian's appointees is associated with similar odium, but also with the emperor's most magnificent monument. The jurist Tribonianus (Tribonian), who became the highest law officer within the government in 529, was a Pamphylian from Side, an unapologetic pagan, and completely corrupt in his legal dealings; a judge for whom the outcome of a court case was for sale to the highest bidder. However, he was also beguilingly charming, an expert on the law, and astonished everyone who met him with his erudition. Almost a century had passed since publication of the *Codex Theodosianus*, but

by comparison with Justinian's ambition, the work of Theodosius II represented a relatively simple exercise of compiling edicts. Justinian desired a total overhaul of the law, an entirely new code that would substitute clarity for confusion. Under the leadership of Tribonian, a special commission set about the task with unbelievable speed, and by April 8, 529, in less than fourteen months, produced the new codex. It became the supreme authority for every court in the empire one week later. Tribonian did not stop at this point, and in 530 a second commission began to organize the major writings of all previous jurists, collectively known as the *Digest* or *Pandects*. In everything that was done in the recodifying, Justinian ensured that there was nothing incompatible with Christian teaching.

It would be easy to imagine that by this period pagan worship had been entirely eradicated, but Justinian's legislation gives the lie to this supposition. Pagans were barred from the civil service, and Christians who became apostate were condemned to death, as was any person discovered making a secret sacrifice to the old gods. As had occurred previously, classical scholars were expected to demonstrate their faith through baptism or be denied payment for their work and face banishment. Justinian also acted against Manicheans and the Samaritans. In the early sixth century the Samaritans—hated by Christians and Jews alike—made up a large number of the farmers in the two northern provinces of Palestine, with their center at Neapolis (biblical Shechem). In early 529 Justinian ordered the Samaritan synagogues destroyed, and as a consequence the Samaritans revolted. There were some early Samaritan successes, but eventually imperial forces overwhelmed them, their leader was beheaded, and thousands of his followers sold into slavery. Even two decades later Procopius commented on the devastation to the Palestinian economy this disaster caused.

As has been related above, when Justin ascended the throne Anastasius's nephew Hypatius was *magister militum per Orientem*, a peacetime posting that suited his poor abilities, but as war with Persia loomed Justinian replaced him in 529. The new *magister militum* was Belisarius, a young Thracian soldier who had shown promising talent in the previous two years while commanding the fortress of Daras, which Anastasius had built on the frontier in violation of treaty obligations with the Persians. His appointment proved to be a good decision. In June 530 Belisarius won a spectacular victory at Daras over superior Persian forces. In the following year, however, the

Persians fought Belisarius to a draw at Callinicum on the Euphrates and, perhaps as a consequence, he was recalled to Constantinople. Procopius laid the blame for this failure at the feet of the Arabic Ghassanid allies of the empire, but another account by John Malalas, a monophysite Antiochene who chronicled the reigns of Anastasius to Justin II, accused Belisarius of incompetence in his leadership. But Kavadh's death in September brought an unexpected peace to the frontier. His successor, Khosrow III (of the Sassanid dynasty), needed to consolidate his authority, for he was not his father's eldest son. In 532, Justinian and Khosrow agreed on the Endless Peace, which proved to be neither. The Romans paid eleven thousand pounds of gold, and within eight years Khosrow was ready to take to the field.

Rebuilding Constantinople

The oppression of John of Cappadocia and peculation of Tribonian contributed to a growing expression of grievance among the people, both in the capital and the provinces, but it was the Blues and Greens that brought Constantinople to its knees in 532. Angered by the slights and satires of the Blues, who felt keenly their abandonment by the emperor, Justinian began a repression of both factions, limiting their privileges and meting out sometimes harsh punishment for any excesses. When the two parties clashed in the hippodrome on January 10 he immediately sent in the *excubitorii* to restore order. Seven ringleaders were subsequently condemned to death, although two, half-dead, were rescued and placed in sanctuary. One was a Blue, the other a Green; enemies with a common cause. Three days later as Justinian took his place in the hippodrome he was greeted by jeers from the Blues and the Greens, but not at each other. For the first time ever, the factions were united in their common anger. The mob shouted “Nika! Nika!”—“Victory! Victory!” the usual cry of support for their teams—in menacing unison at the emperor instead of raucously at each other as was usually the case.

Attempting to ignore the outcry, Justinian ordered the races to start, but when the spectacle failed to calm the rioters he canceled the last few contests. The mob—many of their number swelled by the recent influx of peasants dispossessed of their holdings through taxation—went wild and poured out of the hippodrome, bent on destruction. The home of the *praefectus urbi* was attacked, the guards killed, and the building set on fire. In rapid succession the rioters destroyed the *praetorium*, setting its prisoners free, the senate house, the Baths of Zeuxippus and Alexander, and even attacked St. Sophia. By the end of the day much of Constantinople was in flames; and so it continued for five terrifying days and nights.

On the second day of chaos, the mob demanded the removal of John of Cappadocia, Tribonian, and Eudaimon, the *praefectus urbi*, which in his panic Justinian agreed to. However, this was not enough and there came shouts for a new emperor. First named was Probus, the nephew of Anastasius who had chosen to share the couch with his brother Pompeius during the late-emperor’s divination to discover his would-be successor. But Probus was (wisely?) absent from the city, so in frustration the mob burned his house down. On January 18 Justinian attempted what had worked well for Anastasius and faced a packed hippodrome, offering everyone amnesty if they would return

to their homes. But the rioters would not have their fury disarmed, and again the emperor was forced to flee to the security of the palace, and there—for a reason of his own, but lost to us—he ordered Hypatius and his cousin Pompeius from his presence.

Both men, understandably alarmed for their safety in the riot-torn streets, slunk to their homes. But Hypatius was recognized and the mob's ringleaders set up a cry for his elevation. Now a man of advanced years and no imperial ambition, Hypatius tried to hide but was chased down and taken to Constantine's forum, where—joined by his cousin Pompeius—he was roughly gowned in purple and crowned with a gold circlet. From here the mass of rioters surged toward the hippodrome so that their new emperor could mount to the pulvinator and address them before leading them in an assault on the palace.

Procopius says that Justinian now argued for flight to avoid certain death, but that in peremptory tones the empress confronted him. Wearing his official-historian's hat, Procopius paints Theodora in an admirable light he never allowed her in his *Anecdota*:

If you, my lord, wish to escape, you will have no difficulty in doing so. Here is the sea; there are the ships. But consider first whether, when you reach safety, you will not regret that you did not choose death in preference. As for me, I stand by the ancient saying: "There is no grander sepulcher for any man than the kingship."

This last line may also be translated as "kingship is a good shroud" and is a misquotation of the famous maxim that was once ironically thrown at the tyrant of Syracuse, Dionysius the Elder: "tyranny is a good shroud." Contemporary readers would have known the quotation Procopius purposely misplaced on Theodora's lips and may have wryly considered the writer's emendation redundant.

Fortunately, due to his recent recall from the eastern frontier, Belisarius was present in the palace. So too was an Illyrian general named Mundus, who was only by chance passing through the capital with a unit of Heruli mercenaries on their way back from the eastern front (he had briefly replaced Belisarius there). These two were the empire's best generals, and although neither commanded a large force they had surprise on their side. They slipped out of the palace grounds and went by separate routes to surround the hippodrome.

At the same time a middle-aged Armenian named Narses, a eunuch who had attained the distinguished rank of grand chamberlain, took a sum of money to try to bribe any Blues he knew to the imperial cause. He also led sufficient men to guard the hippodrome exits and gave

them orders to cut down any who tried to escape. Inside, the trained soldiers fell on the screaming mob without mercy. The two generals did their work relentlessly, slaughtering everyone, whether Green or Blue, citizen of Constantinople or newly arrived stranger, so that the arena ran with more blood than it ever had in the days of gladiatorial combat. By the evening, when silence finally settled over the city (and depending on which ancient authority is to be believed), between thirty and fifty thousand lay dead.

Justinian was typically inclined to be merciful toward Hypatius and Pompeius, but Theodora would have none of it. Hypatius is said to have faced his fate with courage, and said to the weeping Pompeius, "Courage, my cousin, do not demean yourself. We perish as innocent men, for we could not resist the pressure of the people, and it was out of no ill-will to the emperor that we went into the hippodrome." Justinian gave way to his wife's will, and the next day the two men were executed and their bodies thrown into the sea.

The Nika revolt (as it came to be called) taught Justinian a lesson. Although John of Cappadocia and Tribonian were soon restored to their offices, there was no return to the harsh taxation. In corollary, the emperor's subjects had learned that Justinian was not a ruler to mess with, and returned to normal life much chastened. The wreckage of the city also benefited Justinian's undampened enthusiasm for construction on a grand scale, and in fact work began on St. Sophia just over a month after the riots, on February 23, 532, under the personal direction of the emperor. This was to be the third incarnation of the church, and the final one, in the shape we know it today: a massive square rising into a high dome and by far the largest building in Christendom for seven hundred years (until Seville Cathedral). The first had been built in the reign of Constantius and destroyed in the riots following the expulsion of St. John Chrysostom in 404. The second, dedicated by Theodosius II, was constructed along the lines of a standard basilica, and this Justinian must have been planning to rebuild because the revolutionary design of his architects Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus could not have been prepared in under six weeks.

[37. Link to: Vandals and Goths](#)

Belisarius in Africa

The important events in the remainder of Justinian's reign did not take place in Constantinople; it is two of the men who helped him in his hour of need that now take the concluding parts of this history forward, in Africa and Italy—Belisarius the general and Narses the eunuch.

Belisarius was born in about 505, which made him barely out of his youth when he was given command in 527 of Daras, the newly built fortress standing on a hill above the once-proud Roman frontier city of Nisibis. And it was here that he made the appointment that was to ensure his fame throughout history, that of Procopius as his jurist and counselor. It was probably shortly after his recall to Constantinople that Belisarius married Antonina, a close associate of the empress Theodora—albeit the women's relationship was frequently a stormy one. It is a matter for conjecture as to whether Belisarius was recalled to Constantinople in 531 because of his disappointment at Callinicum or because Justinian already had ambitious plans in mind for the young general following his success at Daras. In any event, little time was wasted in mounting a campaign to achieve what Basiliscus had so disastrously failed in: bringing down the North African Vandal kingdom and the restoration of its provinces to the empire.

The scheme had been brewing in Justinian's mind for some time, certainly since King Hilderic, son of Huneric and Eudocia, the daughter of Valentinian III, had been overthrown by his cousin Gelimer in June 531. Justinian had been engaged in friendly correspondence with Hilderic, who as a Roman on his mother's side espoused her orthodox Catholicism rather than the Arian creed of his father, and the emperor felt bound to insist on the Vandal king's restoration. Gelimer's response was not calculated to please Justinian. There was nothing more desirable, he told "King Justinian," than that a monarch should mind his own business. The Endless Peace signed with Persia left Justinian free to invade Africa.

His closest advisors met this proposal with a cool reaction, especially John of Cappadocia, who cautioned against the waste, the enormous distance, either by land or sea, and the time two-way messages would take. But Gelimer's insult rankled; and during the summer of 532 the expedition set out, with Antonina at Belisarius's side (he was to take her with him on every campaign).

The army consisted of ten thousand infantry and five thousand cavalry, composed of regular Romano-Byzantine soldiers and a larger

portion of *foederati*, mostly Huns, but also some Heruli. This force sailed in a fleet of five hundred transports manned by up to twenty thousand sailors, and accompanied by ninety-two *dromones*. The *dromon* was the smallest ship of the Byzantine navy, light and built for speed, carrying a rowing crew of twenty and covered over to protect against missiles.

The army's general enthusiasm was dampened by an incident that Belisarius turned to his advantage. While temporarily becalmed in the Hellespont he was obliged to hang two drunken Huns for murdering a comrade. Procopius noted that Huns were the most intemperate drinkers in the world and such an event was natural in their order of things, but Belisarius told the gathered soldiers that no man, whether Roman or *foederati*, should be allowed "to plead drunkenness as an excuse for his crime, which was rather its exaggeration." And he went on to berate them that they were a Christian army on a holy mission and should behave appropriately. Seeing his ferocious determination, even the Huns quieted down, but Belisarius was to remain rightly suspicious of their loyalty.

A second mishap befell off the Peloponnese, when some five hundred soldiers fell seriously ill with food poisoning caused by eating rotten biscuit. Apparently John of Cappadocia, exercising imprudent economies, had sent the dough not to a proper bakery but to the furnace heating the baths of Achilles, where it had come out only half-baked. The outbreak forced a delay for reprovisioning, and then the fleet sailed on to Catana (Catania). Sicily was in Ostrogothic hands, and officially still friendly to Constantinople, so it made a useful base for gathering intelligence on the enemy's dispositions. It was quickly established through sailors recently returned from Carthage that Gelimer was completely unaware of the approaching fleet. In fact the Vandals were engaged in putting down an uprising in Sardinia, that had been fomented by *agentes* of Justinian to create a diversion. Belisarius gave the order to sail at once, and his army landed safely on the African coast to the north of Hadrumentum (Sousse). From here the legions began a march of one hundred and forty miles toward the Vandal capital. But hindered by the baggage train, the five-day journey took twice that time, and the Romans had only reached *ad decimum* (the tenth milestone from Carthage) when, on September 13 Gelimer struck.

The Vandal usurper had acted quickly as soon as the Roman ships had been spotted offshore keeping pace with the imperial army. His

fleet and a part of his army were indeed in Sardinia, but he still had plenty of men to mount a dangerous ambush. He paused only to issue orders for the murder of Hilderic and his family, and then outlined his plan. His brother Ammatas was to attack the Roman vanguard, while his nephew Gibamund struck at the center, and he himself dealt with the rear. Gelimer's strategy was admirable, and should have succeeded, but these were not the Vandals of Gaiseric. Grown lazy and complacent in the peaceful years of good living, the Teutonic warriors were more likely to be found around martial campfires swapping stories of old rather than in training for war. The plan required careful timing, and Gelimer's communications failed him. Ammatas attacked too soon, and was killed by the prepared Roman foot. Gibamund hesitated to support Ammatas, and instead of advancing drew his men up in line of battle, at which point the Roman cavalry—mostly terrifying Huns—swept through their ranks. The Vandals turned and ran for their lives.

Gelimer fared little better. After an initial success, in which he managed to separate Belisarius and his staff officers from the bulk of the army, the Vandal king came across his brother's body. The sight unmanned him, and he refused to move further until the corpse had been safely removed from the field. Belisarius recognized the opportunity and counterattacked, scattering the Vandal host in all directions. Gelimer fled with the remnant of his forces west into the Numidian desert, and on September 15, 532 Belisarius victoriously entered Carthage.

There was no sack or pillage. The army was under strict orders from Justinian to respect the property and lives of what were, even after a century of barbarian occupation, still Roman citizens. The emperor's proclamation, handed out at all the towns and villages on the march, most of whose inhabitants had joyously welcomed the invaders, stated that the army was not making war on civilians, but only removing the usurper Gelimer. But Gelimer was not finished. From his temporary base at Bulla Regia in Numidia, some hundred miles west of Carthage, he summoned back to Africa Tzazo, his surviving brother, from his command of the Sardinian expedition. Gelimer spent the few weeks waiting for Tzazo's arrival recruiting from among the local Berber tribes, offering a bounty for every Roman head taken. And so by mid-December he was ready to go back on the offensive.

The Vandals Brought to Book

When he was newly in occupation of the province, Gaiseric had ordered the tearing down of all town and city walls in order to discourage civil insurrection and make potential armed access for his warriors easier. While this policy had been a great aid to Belisarius during his advance, it also meant that Carthage was not easily defended in a siege. He also had a real cause to suspect the loyalty of the Huns under his command. It was known by his *agentes* that the Huns had been approached by Gelimer's spies making appeals to their common Arian bond. If they were to desert, Belisarius preferred that they did so in the open, rather than catch him out behind flimsy siege defenses. He, too, gave the order to march, and the Romans met the Vandal army at Tricamarum, thirty miles west of Carthage, on December 15.

This was no ambush situation as had been the case at *ad decimum*, but a prepared battle on open ground, entirely suited to Roman arms and tactics. Nevertheless, there was fierce hand-to-hand combat amid the Vandals' ranks after repeated Roman charges; and in the fighting Tzazo was slain at the side of his brother. Once again Gelimer hesitated. Alarmed at his indecision, his men began to fall back, and at this point the Huns—who, as Belisarius had suspected, had been waiting to see which way the fortunes of war went—spurred their horses into a mighty charge, and swept away the Vandals. Belisarius advanced to Hippo Regius (Gaiseric's first capital) and seized the royal treasure stored there, before returning to Carthage. Gelimer escaped to wander the desultory Numidian hills for several months before surrendering. It is said that when he was brought into Belisarius's presence, he was openly laughing, and it was suspected that his sufferings had unhinged his mind. The war was over, although operations along the Mauretanian coast were to continue for a further seven years.

In the summer of 533, Belisarius left the continued pacification of Africa in the hands of the praetorian prefect, although a mutiny was to force his temporary return two years later. In spite of this setback, the pacification of Africa was successful and returned it to imperial administration, also making it possible to contemplate the recapture of Spain.

Due to the impetus given by Belisarius's effective North African campaign, Justinian would soon be able to boast that once again the empire extended from Euxinus to Atlanticus. His dominions by the

end of his reign included the recovered provinces of Mauretania (Tingitana and Caesariensis), Numidia, Africa Proconsularis, Tripolitania, the Balearic islands, Corsica, Sardinia, and Sicily. A decade later he would complete the boast by a reconquest of Spain, although really only in part and only nominally.

For the Visigothic masters of Spain, the first warning of danger came with Belisarius's recovery of Vandal North Africa and the eviction of a Visigothic garrison from Septem (Ceuta) in 534. King Theodis disastrously attempted to recapture it in 547, and died soon after at the hands of an assassin. In 551 Justinian was presented with an opportunity to strike at the Iberian peninsula itself. A rebellion of Roman citizens at Corduba, and a simultaneous mutiny by Athnagild against his kinsman King Agila, led to a joint call for Byzantine help. Justinian ordered Narses, then commanding the Italian recovery, to detach a small force and send it to Spain. With the Visigothic army divided in loyalty between the king and Athnagild, the Romans met with almost no resistance and soon occupied the whole area south of a line between Valentia-Corduba-Gades.

However, in the summer of 533 Justinian wanted his general back in Constantinople to brief him on an even more ambitious scheme. But first the emperor, who loved Roman custom, wanted to award Belisarius a triumph. The last non-imperial recipient of this honor had been Lucius Cornelius Balbus in 19 BC, and in recent centuries the practice had almost died out, even for emperors. And so, for the massed and cheering spectators, it must have been an awesome sight to see this ancient ceremony enacted in the hippodrome, scene of so much recent misery. Even so, to emphasize his non-imperial status, Belisarius entered the stadium on foot rather than riding in the emperor's traditional *quadriga*, and advanced to bow before Justinian and Theodora alongside the most important of his prisoners, Gelimer.

The occasion was enhanced by the glittering array of Vandal treasures, paraded in a succession of groaning wagons. Among the booty was the menorah, the sacred seven-branched candelabra of the Jews that Titus had removed from the ruins of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem in AD 71, and which in turn Gaiseric had stolen from Rome in 455. Later, Justinian returned it to the small Jewish community which had reformed in Jerusalem, after he had been assured by the Jews in Constantinople that bad luck would follow its detention. Gelimer was pardoned, and set free with his family to settle in Galatia, but his fellow-prisoners were sent to the eastern front,

there to survive in the wars as best they might.

The retaking of Africa was only a prelude to the much greater task of restoring the Western Roman empire, a dream of Justinian's from the moment he gained power. It was, however, a distinctly different prospect from the African campaign. Italy was, in theory, a vassal of the empire, and while it was Arian in creed, the Ostrogothic kings had done nothing to suppress the orthodoxy of the papal see, on the contrary Theodoric had done much to strengthen its position. Julian was also aware that the Roman citizens of Italy had enjoyed a settled and prosperous period under Theodoric, and might well resent an intrusion from the East, and especially rail at the increased tax burden that would inevitably follow.

However, after Theodoric's death, the loyalty of the Ostrogothic line was uncertain, and Justinian's advisors counseled that he would not be able to keep Africa while the lands of Sicily and Italy were in alien, possibly in the future hostile, hands. It was clear that the Ostrogothic kingdom must go, but it was also obvious that Justinian needed a proper, legal pretext for invasion if he was to gain the support of the Roman populace. Fortunately, he was given one.

Theodahad
Theodahadus

[*Ruler Italy October 2, 534 to August 536*]

At the end of chapter sixteen, Athalaric, the youthful but entirely debauched grandson of Theodoric, had just died on October 2, 534, with the throne passing to Theodoric's nephew Theodahad, the last surviving male of his line. Some years before this point, Athalaric's mother Amalasuntha, having been removed from her son's regency by Gothic chieftains and, fearing her exposed position, had entered into secret correspondence with Justinian. Aware how improved his cause would be among the Goths in Italy with the daughter of the great Theodoric at his side, the emperor greeted her advances cordially, and assured her that he was preparing a palace for her at Dyrrachium, ready for her to take asylum there. But before any further plans could be advanced, inconvenient Athalaric expired of excess.

The new king was not popular. His avarice and suspect dealings had made him the largest land-owner in Italy. Theodahad had created an enormous *latifundium* from land in much of Tuscia and had extensive holdings in the Campania, to the very edge of Rome. As Procopius wryly put it: "to have neighbors of any kind seemed a sad misfortune." But for Theodahad ruling held little interest; he preferred the scholarly studies of a landed noble amid his vast solitude. Theodahad had also been in communication with Justinian, and also secretly for—as Amalasuntha did—he feared the animosity of the patriotic Gothic party in Ravenna. This, however, she could not have known when she saw her opportunity to retrieve some of that power lost to her. Theodahad received Amalasuntha's approach favorably, and agreed to her suggestion that they should share the throne equally. In that way Theodahad could enjoy the privileges of kingship without the burden of its responsibilities, while she managed the government from Ravenna. She had no wish to marry him (anyway, he already was), it was to be simply a joint-monarchy. For a short while, therefore, Amalasuntha felt that she did not need Justinian's protection, which effectively put on hold his ambitions in Italy... however, not entirely.

Soon after Amalasuntha's pact with Theodahad, an embassy from Constantinople arrived at Ravenna with a complaint from Justinian regarding Lilybaeum. This western-most town in Sicily had belonged to the Vandals as a part of that treaty signed between Gaiseric in his last year and Orestes, which in turn meant the Goths held almost all of

the island. But when the Romans claimed Lilybaeum as part of their conquest of Gelimer's dominions, the Goths refused to yield it. There were a few other items of complaint, but none of significance, and indeed the question of Lilybaeum itself was of no real consequence. In public, Amalasuntha regally rejected Justinian's claim to the tiny promontory, while in private she entertained his ambassador in secret discussions that dealt with her handing over the whole of Sicily and Italy.

How this intriguing situation might have developed, will never be known, for almost as soon as the proclamation of joint-monarchy had been announced Theodahad began to regret a decision that, with hindsight, appeared to have been made in haste. The restored Amalasuntha had many enemies in high places at Ravenna, and they were only too happy to enter into a plot with the king to remove the queen. In April 535 she was taken and imprisoned in a fortress on an island in the lake of Volsiniensis (Bolsena). On hearing of Amalasuntha's imprisonment, Justinian had a message passed on to Theodahad warning that if the queen were not immediately freed and restored to her throne, he would be forced to intervene. Procopius informs us in *Anecdota* that the empress Theodora sent a second message to Theodahad telling him not to worry, that her husband was only posturing for form's sake, and that he could do with impunity what he liked with his prisoner. This, says the historian, was purely jealousy on Theodora's part; she had no wish to see a barbarian queen arriving in Constantinople to steal her glory. It could also, of course, be interpreted as the empress acting as an agent provocateur, to goad Theodahad into rash action and thus prompting a war.

In any case Justinian's warning to Theodahad came too late. Shortly after her incarceration, Amalasuntha was strangled to death in her bath, and although Theodahad vigorously disclaimed responsibility, the gifts he gave to her murderers were sufficient to damn him.

By the murder of his cousin, Theodahad had played straight into Justinian's hands, and given him the pretext he had been looking for. Mundus was made *magister militum per Illyricum* and sent to occupy Dalmatia, which the Ostrogothic kingdom had inherited from Odoacer's invasion after the death of Julius Nepos. Belisarius, fresh from his triumph, was dispatched in 535 to Sicily with an army of seven thousand five hundred men—a number amounting to hardly more than one of Julius Caesar's many legions.

Its composition is uncertain, but there were troops drawn from confederate Huns, Isaurians, some Berber Moors, and some four thousand recruited from the medley of Teutonic and Slavonic peoples now roaming the southern shores of the Danube. As Thomas Hodgkin points out in *The Barbarian Invasions of the Roman Empire*, it may have called itself Roman, its enemies may have derided it as Greek, but it was essentially a barbarian band. However, it fared well in Sicily, where the Gothic forces, probably few in number, were easily overwhelmed. But before Belisarius could cross to the mainland, a mutiny in the army occupying Africa commanded his attention for several weeks. On his return, he found the temper of his own troops uncertain, and with winter approaching, decided to remain for the rest of the year in Sicily raising his men's morale.

In Dalmatia events had not turned out as happily for Mundus. He encountered much stiffer resistance than had been anticipated, and after a few weeks the general was killed in battle. Meanwhile, Theodahad, panicked by Belisarius's swift reduction of Sicily, had entered into private negotiations with Justinian. But the emperor's terms were humiliating: an annual tribute in gold and fighting men; the removal of the king's right to sentence senators or to ennoble any citizen without Justinian's approval; and that Justinian's statues or images on coins should take preference over his own. With an uncharacteristic burst of courage, Theodahad rejected the terms, and in spite issued coins with only his own portrait on them. This petulant display soon crumbled, however, when Belisarius crossed the strait from Sicilia and landed his army at Rhegium (Reggio) in early May 536.

From this beach-head, meeting no resistance, Belisarius was soon outside Neapolis (Naples), whose citizens refused him entry and defended themselves for three weeks. The city fell after a band of Isaurians crawled along an ancient conduit that had been discovered, and attacked the defenders from the rear. Neapolis was subjected to days of pillage, rape, and slaughter by the semi-savage barbarian horde; but Belisarius had fairly warned the Neapolitans in advance that resistance would certainly lead them to this fate.

As has been noted previously, Gothic interest in the south of Italy was scant, and while the advance of Belisarius would have caused alarm, it hardly harmed the Goths. But the fall of Neapolis was a different matter. The Roman army was now on the edge of the Campania, where even the king held lands. Inevitably, blame for the

disaster was placed on Theodahad's shoulders, and the never-popular monarch was excoriated for failing to send a relief army to Neapolis. It was whispered at large that he was, in fact, in league with Belisarius to betray Italy, a reasonable assumption considering his secret dealings with Justinian.

A conclave of Gothic leaders met in assembly near Terracina, and declared Theodahad deposed. Sensing the end was near, Theodahad fled for the dubious sanctuary of Ravenna. Since there was no surviving male of Theodoric's line—only Matasuntha, the young sister of Athalaric, remained—they raised up an elderly general named Witigis. The new king's first command was to execute the old one, and this task was eagerly taken up by a vengeful Goth named Optaris, whom Theodahad had at some point harmed through his venal dealings. Optaris caught up with his victim near Ravenna. He threw Theodahad to the ground and sliced open his throat.

Fearing that Belisarius was preparing to march on Rome, the second act of Witigis should have been to organize the city's defenses. Instead, he announced a retreat to Ravenna in order to consolidate his forces and draw up a strategy. He had a second reason: the divorce of his wife so he could marry Matasuntha. To be fair, there were some sound reasons for this match. Witigis was of humble origins, and a royal marriage could only improve his status. Then there was the danger that if Matasuntha married another suitor, her husband would become a dynastic threat. Finally, Witigis hoped that, with the granddaughter of Theodoric on the throne, Justinian could be persuaded to desist in his intervention in Italy. Alas, in the last he was to be disappointed, and the hasty divorce and marriage did more to damage his reputation than enhance his social position. For her part, young Matasuntha remained devoutly loathing of her aged husband.

In fact Belisarius made no hurried advance on Rome, instead spending the summer months consolidating the Byzantine hold on the south of the peninsula. During this lull, embassies between himself and Pope Silverius (563–67) arranged for the peaceful occupation of the ancient capital. Thus it was that on December 9, 536 the Roman army marched into Rome by the Porta Asinaria as the Gothic garrison left through the Porta Flaminia, bringing the city back to the empire for the first time in sixty years. By negotiating with Belisarius, the papacy and Roman senate had hoped to avoid a repetition of Naples, but they were soon to be disabused of the notion that they had altogether avoided a siege.

Less sanguine of the immediate future, Belisarius set about making essential repairs to the Aurelian Wall and gathering food supplies. His preparations were not in vain. In March 537 the army of Witigis approached. There was a fierce battle that started near the Pons Mulvius, where in 312 Constantine had first raised the Christian banner against the forces of Maxentius. From here the Romans were driven back to the very gates of the city and the Goths surrounded Rome. The siege lasted for a year and nine days, a period of misery for both sides. Witigis ordered the destruction of every aqueduct leading into the city, a blow from which Rome was not to recover until the early Renaissance in a thousand years' time.

During the course of the siege, reinforcements arrived from Constantinople, the first at the end of April, one thousand six hundred

Slavs and Huns, who managed to break through the Gothic lines. In November five thousand more infantry and cavalry arrived under the command of John, nephew of the rebellious Vitalian who had so plagued Anastasius. By this stage, the plight of the besiegers was as bad as that of the besieged; starving within, dying of disease without. With his increased garrison, Belisarius was able to order several sorties and, defeated in various encounters, the Goths finally asked for a three-month truce, during which they made peace overtures. Against his better judgment, Belisarius forwarded these to Justinian, but loathe to give Witigis time to recoup, he commanded John to harry the eastern slopes of the Appenines. However, John exceeded his orders, passing by Auximum (Osimo) and Urbinum (Urbino) to seize Ariminum (Rimini), only thirty-three miles from Ravenna, and occupied the city with his two thousand Isaurian cavalry.

John's dashing exploit, his sudden proximity to the capital, not to mention reports of his handsomeness, excited Matasuntha's interest, and she sent him an appeal to "rescue" her. On learning that the enemy was now in control of an important center two hundred miles to his rear, and that his wife was proposing to betray Ravenna to John, Witigis lifted the siege of Rome. The retreat began in the middle of March 538, but the Goths were not left alone. Belisarius led his men out of the gates and fell on their rearguard, leaving several hundred dead on the banks of the Tiber or swept away in the spring flood.

Bad Feeling Brings Disaster

Belisarius's main concern now was rash John, exposed in Ariminum, with the Gothic army falling back toward him. Two trusted officers were dispatched to order his return, but with a rebellious streak no doubt inherited from his uncle Vitalian, he refused. Suddenly, Witigis appeared with his retreating army and surrounded the town. John's position was perilous for, unlike Rome, Ariminum was not prepared. Belisarius, furious at his subordinate's disobedience, deliberated whether to leave him to his fate, though he could ill-afford to lose the two thousand Isaurians. At this critical point the eunuch Narses arrived from the East with an imperial army of five thousand men to join Belisarius at Firmium (Fermo). Eventually, Narses, who "loved him [John] above all other men" according to Procopius, persuaded the general to go to John's rescue.

A superb strategist, Belisarius planned a two-pronged amphibious assault. Almost all his forces approached by sea, while a smaller land unit contrived to persuade the Goths outside Ariminum that they confronted a far larger army than really existed. The Goths were put to flight, and the Isaurians saved. John, however, ignored Belisarius, refused to thank him, and heaped praise instead on Narses.

Because of John's ingratitude and Narses' equanimity in accepting the undeserved tribute, the mopping up operation began amid a new distrust among the commanders. At first things proceeded smoothly, the Romans taking Urbinum, Imolensis (Imola), and the province of Aemilia. But then came a disaster that arose entirely from the bad feeling between Narses and Belisarius. In the previous spring Belisarius had taken an uncharacteristically dangerous gamble in sending one thousand troops to Mediolanum (Milan) at the request of the archbishop to save the city from Gothic Arianism. This small detachment had gone by sea to Genua and then crossed the Padus (Po) to defeat a Gothic army outside Ticinum (Pavia). Several grateful towns opened their gates to the Byzantines, each requiring a small garrison to remain behind, so that on reaching Mediolanum, there were only three hundred men left.

When he heard of Mediolanum's betrayal Witigis reacted to this bitter blow by sending an army under the command of his nephew Uraias to recover it. At the same time Theodebert, the Frankish king, sent some ten thousand Burgundi to help the Goths. And so by mid-summer 538, Mediolanum—a city far larger than Rome—was surrounded by a massive enemy force, and defended by very few

soldiers. Unaware of the Frankish intervention, Belisarius ordered north a detachment that he believed to be strong enough to relieve the city from the Goths, but when its commanders saw the swollen numbers of the enemy they refused to advance further without support from John and Justin, the recently arrived *magister militum per Illyricum* and Mundus's successor. Belisarius issued the command only to be flatly refused by both men, who insisted that they would only take orders from Narses.

Even now Belisarius kept his temper, and sent messages to Narses, but by the time the eunuch confirmed the order in the first months of 539, Mediolanum had fallen. Uraias mercifully offered quarter to the small Byzantine garrison, but not to the treacherous citizens who had invited in the enemy. Every man in the city was put to the sword, perhaps as many as three hundred thousand were slaughtered, the women were taken into slavery or given as gifts to the Burgundi soldiers; and then the Goths sacked the city. Mediolanum was the largest, most populous, and most prosperous city in Italy, but by the time the Goths finished not one stone was left standing on another. The once-imperial tetrarchic capital had been erased from the face of the earth.

It was a ruinous disaster, but for Belisarius some good came of it. Using her influence with Theodora, Belisarius's wife Antonina sent letters that persuaded the emperor of her husband's innocence in the matter, and Justinian recalled Narses. The two thousand Heruli he had brought with him also left, refusing to serve under any other, but their defection was a price Belisarius was willing to pay to be back in sole command of the campaign again. He was now free again to concentrate his forces for the final push on Ravenna. Soon, the imperial fleet blockaded the seaward approach and his infantry surrounded the land walls. The position for Witigis was fearful. And then one day toward the end of 539 an embassy arrived from Constantinople offering the Goths a treaty. In return for capitulation they would be allowed to keep half their treasure and all of Italy north of the Padus.

This astonishing turn of events infuriated Belisarius, within inches of total victory, but its cause lay far to the east. Justinian had become increasingly concerned at the warlike preparations of the Persians. He could not afford to take risks with Khosrow, even if that meant abandoning the completion of his Italian dream. Justinian needed Belisarius on the eastern front. Witigis could not believe his luck, but

he made a fatal error. Uncertain that the offer was not just a shabby diplomatic trick, he insisted that the treaty would only be valid if it was also signed by Belisarius as well as the imperial ambassadors. Smiling grimly, Belisarius refused to sign, unless he was ordered to do so by his emperor. The general had bought time.

During the stalemate that followed, Witigis made an extraordinary proposal: he would surrender his crown and throne if Belisarius would proclaim himself emperor of the West. How many soldiers during the course of this history would have given their right hands for such an open offer? Had there yet been such a general as this, having accomplished so much, who had not dreamed of claiming the purple in his own name? Belisarius did not disappoint. First dispatching those of his staff he distrusted (the party of John and Narses) to go foraging, he accepted the offer, and the Goths flung open Ravenna's gates to receive their new emperor. It was an astonishing sight. Row upon row of tall and martial Goths lined the streets, far outnumbering their Roman conquerors, all bowing before Belisarius. Procopius noted that their women failed to be impressed, either by the Romans or the spirit of their own men: "Are these the mighty heroes," they cried, "with whose deeds you have terrified us? Are these your conquerors? We can no longer call you men, who have been beaten by champions such as these!"

At what point the Goths realized they had been cheated is not recorded. Belisarius probably kept the deceit going long enough that there was no chance for them to rally and fight back. Perhaps when they saw all—rather than half—of the royal treasure being loaded onto Byzantine ships ready for transport to Constantinople it sank in how low their state had fallen. It certainly must have done when King Witigis and the chief nobles were taken aboard loaded down in chains. Procopius insisted that Belisarius never for a moment considered taking Witigis at his word for "he hated the name of usurper with perfect hatred." And yet if that is the case, it might be prudent to wonder why Belisarius sent away those disaffected officers if he was only playing with the Goths?

[38. Link to: War in Italy](#)

Hildebad (Ildibadus)

[Ruler Italy 540–May 541]

Eraric (Erarichus)

[Ruler Italy May–October 541]

Totila (Baduila)

[Ruler Italy October 541–552]

Teias (Theia)

[Ruler Italy 552]

Belisarius might have reasonably hoped for a second triumph for his even greater achievement than the reconquest of Africa, but it was not to be. For one, Justinian was growing jealous of his successful general and disinclined to heap more honors on him; for another, the situation on the eastern front was desperate, and his skills were required there urgently. The events of the Persian war are not really the concern of this history, but it is worth relating them briefly for the purpose of continuity. In March 540 Khosrow crossed the imperial frontier and captured Sura on the Euphrates. From there he marched on Antioch, leaving burning towns behind him, and sacked the great Syrian city.

Justinian accepted a humiliating peace, but Khosrow returned the next year, annexing Lazica, a poor client kingdom, but strategically placed on the Black Sea, and a direct threat to Constantinople. Belisarius was sent to contend with the Persians, but it was a lackluster campaign, ended by an epidemic of dysentery among the troops. The campaign of 542 was equally frustrated, when both sides were hit by a bubonic plague that rapidly spread to all parts of the empire, killing tens of thousands. The emperor himself was stricken, and for weeks his life hung in the balance before he made a slow recovery. Belisarius was only able to take the field again at the beginning of 544, but this time not against Persia. He was again given command of the army in Italy.

Belisarius returned in May that same year to find the peninsula in a miserable state. After Belisarius's recall in 539, Justinian had unwisely refrained from placing one of the commanders left behind in overall command. The obvious choice would have been Vitalian's nephew John; stationed in Rome, he had to contend on an equal basis with six others: Vitalius in Tarvisium in Venetia, Constantin in Ravenna, Justin in Florentina, Cyprianus in Perusia, Bessas in Spolegium and Conan in Neapolis. Instead of working in concert, these petty generals looked to their own interests and used the opportunity to plunder Italy of what

had survived the Gothic war. The situation was further aggravated by Justinian's introduction of the imperial fiscal machinery in the conquered diocese. The *logothete* Alexander, an expert in all the cruel methods of enriching the *fiscus* through the tax-farmers at the expense of the provincials, arrived and soon succeeded in making all parties—Goths, Italians, and soldiers—thoroughly discontented. The army soon became demoralized and many troops deserted to swell the ranks of King Hildebad's forces.

Hildebad held most of the land north of the Padus, notably around Verona and his capital, Ticinum, where the Gothic nobles had proclaimed him to sit on the throne left vacant by Witigis. It is inconceivable that he would have survived for very long if Belisarius had been present, for his army amounted to little more than a thousand men, but he gradually extended his authority over Liguria and Venetia. The peculating generals did nothing to counter this Gothic revival until Hildebad approached the headquarters of Vitalius at Tarvisium. Vitalius, whose forces included a considerable body of Heruli, still bitter enemies of their cousins, the Goths, offered battle and was decisively defeated. Vitalius was lucky to escape, while the Heruli chieftain was slain.

The victory did little to benefit Hildebad because shortly after he was beheaded by one of his own men, a Gepid who bore the king a grudge for making the mistake of betrothing his intended bride to another warrior. In the confusion the Gothic nobles were unable to decide on a new king. The vacuum was filled by the Rugi, subjects of Odoacer who had never fully integrated themselves into the Gothic nation, when they proclaimed one of their own named Eraric. However, he lasted only five months, murdered for attempting to deal with Justinian. This left the way clear for a young man named Baduila to take the Gothic throne. Baduila is how he styled himself on his coins, but to the Greeks, and therefore to history, he was known as Totila, and he proved to be one of the best of all the late Gothic rulers. He was Hildebad's nephew, in his middle twenties, and simply not considered much of a threat to the complacent Roman generals; they were too busy lining their own pockets to hear the call to all-out war.

Totila was a clever politician. He knew that to succeed in throwing out Justinian's soldiers and administrators he needed the support of all his people, not just the Goths but also the Italians. Since the Italian aristocracy had given its allegiance to the emperor and his plenipotentiaries, it was to the middle class, urban proletariat, and

tenant farmers that Totila turned. To many of these, the “Roman” occupiers were really Byzantine Greeks, and the people were burdened by their new, vicious tax-gatherers. Totila promised freedom from oppression, the breaking up of the great *latifundia*, the return of farm land to ordinary people, and the abolition of taxes intended only to furnish fabulous palaces in far-flung lands. His cry to arms found listeners everywhere, and within months of his accession he was ready.

By this time, incensed at his generals’ inactivity, Justinian issued orders to subdue the growing threat, and in the early winter of 541 it was decided that a detachment from the Ravenna garrison under Constantin and the *Logothete* Alexander should attack Totila at his capital of Verona. But the king was ready, and his army of five thousand repulsed the imperial force of some twelve thousand outside the city. Totila moved with speed to pursue them, and in a battle at Faventia annihilated Constantin’s army. In the spring of 542 the Goths attacked Justin at Florentina. The combined armies of John, Bessas, and Cyprian hurried to his relief, but in the locality of Mucellium (Mugello) Totila defeated and routed them. While John retreated to Rome, Totila took towns in Umbria and then—bypassing the strongly fortified urban centers around Rome—surged into the south of the peninsula, razed the walls of Beneventum, and began collecting taxes in the provinces of Lucania, Brutti, Apulia, and Calabria.

Justinian sent out several ineffective praetorian prefects to recover the situation, but none was able to prevent things from getting worse. In 543 Totila besieged Conan in Neapolis, who was soon forced to surrender to the Goths, where in stark contrast to Belisarius the king doled out grain to the starving inhabitants and enforced the good behavior of his troops. By early 544 all of Italy was in his hands, with the exceptions of besieged Hydruntum (Otranto) in the furthest south, and Rome—under John’s command—on which he was preparing to march. This, then was the situation facing Belisarius when he returned to Italy in the summer of 544. It was, however, to be a very different campaign from the first. Justinian had furnished him with no funds, few soldiers, and limited *imperium*. But he did his best, recovering much of the south, although he was unable to prevent Rome from falling into Totila’s hands.

In turn Belisarius regained the city, only to lose it shortly after. In all, during Justinian’s reign, Rome changed hands five times, accurately reflecting the purposeless and desultory battle for Italy

throughout the period. By 548 it was clear that neither side was strong enough to decisively defeat the other. Belisarius determined to appeal to Constantinople for proper funding and a real army, and sent as his ambassador his wife Antonina to speak not with Justinian but with her friend the empress. She left at the start of summer in 548 and arrived in the capital only to find that a few days before, on June 28, Theodora had died. Antonina saw immediately that her mission was doomed. The emperor was inconsolable and no one was in any position to take decisions. She did, however, achieve one result, the recall of Belisarius. Antonina was determined that if anyone were to be blamed for the failure to retake Italy, it would not be her husband.

And so it was that early in 549 Belisarius returned to Constantinople, disillusioned, frustrated, politically impotent. But his efforts had at least held Italy to some degree for the empire, and his resolve laid the foundations for the final triumphant conquest by another. Belisarius now retired to semi-obscurity until Justinian once again called on his best general to save the empire in 559. This time the threat came from the north as a fearful new wave of invaders crossed the Danube, a Hunnish tribe known as the Kotrigurs. He accepted the command, defeated the Kotrigurs, and drove the barbarian horde back across the mighty river. It was his last victory. In 562 he stood trial for a probably trumped-up charge of corruption, was declared guilty and imprisoned. But Justinian released him after a short time and restored him to the court. Belisarius died at the age of about sixty in March 565, barely eight months before the emperor whose name he had done so much to promote to posterity as the last emperor of the Romans.

Italy Restored

[AD 552–56]

To Belisarius's old enemy Narses went the glory of the final conquest of Ostrogothic Italy. The Armenian eunuch was now in his seventy-fifth year, hardly a likely candidate for such an onerous task. But the wily chamberlain was still possessed of good health, knew his emperor better than any man alive, and had already proven his military skills. Moreover, the one Byzantine left in Italy of any worth, Vitalian's nephew John, was devoted to him. Narses was easily able to persuade the emperor to supply an army far greater than ever given to Belisarius: at least thirty-five thousand men, comprised mostly of barbarians: Gepids, Lombards, Heruli, and Huns, together with a small number of captured Persians.

Since Belisarius had left Italy for the final time, Totila had lost Rome to the Byzantines, only to regain it again on January 16, 550. In response, Justinian had appointed his first cousin Germanus to command a relief army. The soldiers had marched across Illyricum as far as Serdica, where unfortunately Germanus was stricken by a fever and died. And so it was that in the early summer of 552, with his reinforcements, Narses collected Germanus's soldiers and continued the overland march across the Julian Alps into Italy. He can have had few illusions as to the task ahead, for the Byzantines now held only four cities in the peninsula: Ravenna and Ancona in the north, Otranto and Crotone in the south. Yet nor can he have had any idea as to how spectacular his success was to be.

On the army's arrival at Ravenna, Narses handed out the demoralized garrison their pay arrears, and spent a few days in preparation for a southward advance, while Totila marched north to block him. The two armies met toward the end of June, at Taginae (Gualdo Tadino), where the eunuch general proved his martial skill by soundly defeating the Goths. Totila was mortally wounded in the battle, and fled with his scattered host in disorder, with the Byzantines in close pursuit. Totila died a few hours later in the small village of Caprae (Capara).

Yet the Goths, with all hope lost, did not give up. They raised up Teia, Totila's best general, to be their king. Teia attempted to renew the alliance with the Franks, but it came to nothing, and the Gothic

remnant was forced further south toward Neapolis. Finally, in the valley of the Draco (Sarno), a scant few miles from buried and forgotten Pompeii, at the end of October 552, the Romans and Goths met for the final time. The battle was short and furiously fought, but its outcome was never in any doubt. Teia was struck by a javelin and died on the spot. Even then the Goths fought on, until only a few remained to negotiate terms. By these, they agreed to leave Italy and never again make war on the empire.

Justinian's great dream had been fulfilled.

But was it worth it? Narses soon drove out any remaining pockets of resistance, mostly in the north (although Verona resisted him for another nine years), and completely reorganized the government of the Byzantine Italian state in 554 by a *Pragmatica Sanctio* ("Pragmatic Sanction," a sovereign's solemn decree on a matter of primary importance and which has the force of law). But what was this new Italy? Years of warfare had reduced the once-prosperous peninsula to a smoking wasteland. Its greatest cities, formerly the pride of a powerful empire, had either been razed or left in such ruin as to be almost uninhabitable. Pestilence and famine stalked the hills and valleys, and the devastated populace had been left with no means of defending themselves from future raiders—and the Langobardi ("Long Beards," or Lombards), recently dismissed from imperial service by Narses, were just waiting to return.

By his new social order, Narses obliterated the senatorial class of Rome, which had survived the fifth-century barbarian invasions, even to flourish under the Ostrogoth Theodoric. The new government, or Exarchate, made Ravenna into a resplendent Byzantine capital, but it had been done at the price of the impoverishment of Italy and Rome. How sad can it be, that Italy's latest period of prosperity, under the benign eye of a great Germanic king, should be ended by a Roman emperor's determination to repossess it as a damaged province of an empire now ruled from Constantinople?

Justinian died suddenly of a heart attack or a stroke on the night of November 14, 565, leaving the empire to Justin, the son of his sister Vigilantia. For his attempt to recreate the glory of the Roman empire, and because he spoke Latin not Greek, Justinian is regarded as the last of the Roman emperors, and the story of his nephew Justin II belongs to that of the Byzantine empire. When he died, Justinian was the effective ruler of more Roman territory than any of his predecessors since the early fifth century, but at the cost of the empire's defenses

along the Danube and the eastern frontier, where they were most needed. And within three years of his death most of Italy would again be lost, to the Langobardi, from which point on any connection with the greatness of the Roman empire was forever lost, and Italy plunged into the darkness of the early medieval period.

[39. Link to: Justinian's Empire](#)

GLOSSARY

Where appropriate the singular is given first, followed by the plural; cross references are indicated by (q.v.).

adlect A process of admitting a man of a lower rank, who possesses merit but insufficient finances, to a higher rank without his having held a traditionally required intermediate rank.

adsidui Roman citizens of the lowest class (*see also* comitia). They owned the minimum amount of property to be classed as land-owners. Dispossessed of his land, an *adsidui* became *infra classem* (beneath the class) and excluded from army service (*see also* mob, the).

aedile A second-level magistracy of the *cursus honorum* (q.v.) between quaestor (q.v.) and praetor (q.v.), whose duties were confined to the city of Rome. There were four: two plebeian and two curule aediles (*see* sella curulis). The plebeian aediles (created 493 BC) first assisted the tribuni plebis (q.v.) in their duties and protection of plebeian rights and were elected by the comitia plebis tributa (*see* comitia). The curule aediles (created 367 BC) were elected by the comitia populi tributa to give patricians a share in the custody of public buildings and records. From the fourth century BC, all four were responsible for Rome's streets, water supply, drainage, grain dole, civic buildings, markets and general facilities.

aerarium Treasury; the main treasury was the *Aerarium Saturni*, sited in the temple of Saturn at the foot of the Capitol. Augustus founded the *Aerarium Militare* to provide pensions for discharged soldiers. Soon after the start of the imperial period control of the *Aerarium Saturni* passed from the senate to the principate, and increasingly finances were funneled through the emperor's personal treasury or "privy purse," the *fiscus*.

ager publicus Land in Roman public ownership usually acquired by right of conquest or confiscated as punishment for disloyalty. The censors (q.v.) leased out the land in a way that usually favored the large estates (*see* latifundia).

alae In the Republic the *Alae Sociorum* were two bodies of Roman allies, cavalry and infantry, which fought on the wings (*alae*) of the battle-line; also referred to as *auxilia* (auxiliaries). In the imperial era *alae* referred exclusively to cavalry, the men under the command of an equestrian *praefectus equitum*, frequently one of their fellow countrymen.

alimenta A welfare system for the feeding of poor children financed by

the investment of capital in mortgage on land, the interest being paid to the city or state. It became state-sponsored when Nerva and Trajan began making gifts from the *fiscus* (see *aerarium*) to Italian cities. This inspired other wealthy men to contribute, and the *alimenta* spread throughout the empire. Evidence indicates that the *alimenta* survived into the third century.

Anatolia Not a country, but the region that approximates modern Turkey from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean north to south, and from the Aegean Sea to modern Armenia, Iran, and Syria.

aqua, aquae Aqueduct; a channel for supplying water from a distant source. The *aqua* might be underground or carried on an arcade. By the time of the middle Republic, the *aquae* were leased by the censors (q.v.) to water companies which charged tariffs to those connected to the supply.

aquilifer The man in a legion who carried the legion's eagle standard. He wore a wolf or lion skin as a mark of his distinction. The rank was probably created by Marius during his army reforms.

armillae Bracelets of gold or silver, which were awarded for valor to legionaries, centurions (q.v.), and *tribuni militum* (q.v.).

atrium The main reception room of a Roman house, usually located centrally, with an opening in the roof and a pool underneath. This was based on the archaic model, where the pool stored household water, but by later times had become ornamental.

auctoritas *lit.* "authority," but in Latin the word meant much more, with overtones of eminence, public leadership, and the ability to influence events through sheer personality.

augur A priest who divined the outcome of future events (taking the *auspices*) by observing the flight of birds according to a manual of interpretation.

auxilia A legion incorporated into the Roman army without its troops having Roman citizenship; the term extended to the cavalry arm, and later referred exclusively to cavalry (see also *alae*).

basilica, basilicae A large building of Greek origin to house public facilities such as banking, law courts, stores, and offices. The first, the Basilica Porcia, was built in Rome by Cato the Censor. *Basilicae* were usually lit by clerestory windows above, and became the standard model in the late Roman period for Christian churches.

biga A two-horse chariot.

bisextilis The Roman equivalent to the extra day added in a leap year.

The extra day was intercalated between February 23 and 24 and, because it did not appear to exist, was considered ill-omened; no business was conducted on any *bisextilis*.

Boni lit. “the good men.” Gaius Gracchus used the term to describe his supporters. Later it became widely used to describe ultra-conservative *optimates* (q.v.), the men whom Julius Caesar loathed.

campus, campi A wide, flat expanse of land, sometimes marshy. The words also described a plain.

Campus Martius The flat area outside the *pomerium* of Rome (q.v.) enclosed by a bend of the Tiber in the west, the Capitol to the south, and the Pincian hill to the north. It was so named because the army did military exercises and cadet training there, although there were also parks and market gardens along the river bank. In later imperial times it was almost completely built over.

Castra Praetoria *see* *cohortes praetorio*

casus belli lit. “cause for war,” in other words, usually an excuse.

cella, cellae lit. “room.” Any room in a Roman house that did not have a name describing its function (which most did), or the main space inside a temple.

censor The most senior Roman magistracy. Two were elected at the same time and held office for five years. A censor had to have been a consul previously. The censor regulated the membership of the senate, the order of knights (*see equites*), and conducted a census of Roman citizens throughout the empire. The censor lacked *imperium* (q.v.) and so was not escorted by lictors.

centurio, centuriones Centurion; a regular professional non-commissioned officer of Roman legions. Half were elected by the troops, the other half appointed by the election winners. The centurion was the backbone of army organization, since the senior officers were usually young aristocrats on attachment, and even the *legati* (q.v.) spent only a short time with their legions.

century An archaic term that applies to any gathering of 100 men (originally, usually soldiers). By the later Republican and early imperial periods, the centuries of the *Comitia Centuriata* (*see comitia*) contained many more than 100 men and had no military significance.

circus A place where chariot races were held, synonymous with Greek term “hippodrome.” The most famous is the Circus Maximus in Rome.

cliens, clientes Client; a free man who pledged himself to his *patronus* (q.v.) in return for various favors, usually financial or legal assistance.

In his turn, a *cliens* could be a *patronus* to his own *clientes*, but these men were also automatically the *clientes* of his *patronus*. In this way a powerful Roman built blocks of supporters to increase his political clout. Clashes between rival supporters frequently led to street violence. In a similar way, colonies, towns, or even allied kingdoms could be *clientes* of Rome itself. The title “Friend and Ally of the Roman People” was a statement of clientship.

clivus A hilly street or a street on a steep incline.

cloaca, cloacae A sewer or drain; Rome’s system of *cloacae* were built in the city’s archaic history, although they were repeatedly enlarged and improved.

cognomen, cognomina A nickname. Roman naming conventions were very restrictive (*see also* gens and praenomen) and the cognomen helped a man distinguish himself from all his fellows having the same first and family name as he.

Cohortes Praetorio Praetorian guard, originally a bodyguard for a praetor (*cohors praetoria*), but later a separate arm of the military devoted to the safe-keeping of an emperor and his family. Augustus was the first to form them into a military elite of nine cohorts, camped in several towns around Rome. Sejanus concentrated the scattered cohorts in the *Castra Praetoria* immediately outside the Servian *pomerium* (q.v.). The guard was usually commanded by two joint-prefects (*see* praefectus praetorio). Diocletian demoted the praetorians to Rome’s garrison; Constantine finally disbanded the guard in favor of the *scholae* (q.v.).

Cohortes Urbanae Three urban cohorts formed Rome’s city police, stationed in the *Castra Praetoria*. Further units were formed and sent to other towns in Italy and the provinces to guard harbors and mints. Each cohort was commanded by a *tribunus* under the overall command of the *praefectus urbi*.

collegium, collegia Association of a number of men having something in common: priestly, political, religious, work-related, military; there were many *collegia* that banded together. Among the trades a *collegium* acted similarly to a guild or a trades union. In the later empire many *collegia* were placed under military discipline to ensure compliance with the state’s needs.

colonia, coloniae A self-administrating settlement or colony established by the state, often with a strategic defensive function. Most *coloniae* founded by Pompey the Great, Julius Caesar, and

Augustus had the joint function of providing settlement land to veteran soldiers and at the same time increasing the process of Romanization of foreign territories. With the right of full citizenship (*civitas optimo iure*) the inhabitants had voting rights, which gave a *colonia* a higher status than a *municipium* (q.v.).

colonus, coloni A tiller of the soil, a tenant farmer.

come, comes The title given in the Eastern empire to a small town or village which had no official status. Its equivalent in the West was *vicus*, *vici*.

comes, comites *lit.* “companion” (of the emperor). In the fourth century smaller forces of mobile, usually mounted, troops (*comitatenses*) detached from an army were commanded by a *comes*, from which we derive the word “count.” In Constantine’s increasingly complex bureaucracy many new offices were given to *comites*. The most distinguished was the *magister officiorum* (q.v.) whose rank was *comes primi ordinis*. Next in line were the two officials in charge of financial administration. The count of sacred largesses (*comes sacrarum largitionum*) handled cash. As such, he ran the mines and mint, collected taxes in specie, and distributed pay and donatives to the army (hence the title). The count of the personal property (*comes rerum privatarum*) ran the emperor’s large number of estates (the *Res Privata*).

comitatenses *see comes*

comitatus *lit.* “the emperor’s traveling court,” derived from *comes*, *comites* (q.v.), the emperor’s companions and commanders of mobile forces. The concept was devised by Diocletian to replace the outmoded *Palatium*, or court officials who resided in the Palatine palace in Rome. Also attached to the *comitatus* were Diocletian’s elite cavalry forces—the *scholae Palatinae*, the *equites comites* and the *equites promoti* (*see schola*).

comitia Any assembly gathered to deal with legislative, governmental, or electoral matters. By the late Republican era there were three main assemblies. The *Comitia Centuriata* organized the people into the Five Classes as defined by an economic means test—from the First (richest) to Fifth (poorest, or *adsidui*). It also elected consuls every year, and censors and praetors every five years. The *Comitia Populi Tributa* (popular assembly) allowed participation of the patricians and met at the order of a consul or praetor in the 35 tribes into which all Roman citizens were divided. It elected the curule aediles, quaestors, and *tribuni militum* (q.v.). The *Comitia Plebis Tributa* (plebeian assembly)

was convoked by a *tribunus plebis* (q.v.) and had the right to enact plebiscites (*plebiscitum*, *plebiscita*, q.v.) and—like the other two committees—conduct trials. It elected the plebeian aediles and *tribuni plebis*.

congiarium, congiara Originally a gift of food distributed to the plebs on the occasion of a festival. In the empire it became a cash largesse, exclusively the gift of the emperor to mark celebrations or to buy popularity.

consilium The advisory council, or cabinet, appointed by the emperor to help him govern. These men—of variable number—may have been either exclusively senators or exclusively equestrians, sometimes both, depending on the emperor. Jurists tended to be prominent, and the *praefecti praetorio* (q.v.) were invariably members. Constantine changed its name to the *sacrum consistorium* (he sat while all the others stood).

consul, consules The most senior magistrate with *imperium* (q.v.). The consuls' primary concerns were to command the military forces, preside over senate meetings, and implement its decisions. Two were proposed each year by the senate but elected by the *Comitia Centuriata* (q.v.). Under the principate awarding the office became increasingly the emperor's prerogative. Consuls could not exercise supreme power because they shared it and served for only one year. In theory each consul was active for a month while his colleague looked on. When active, the consul was said to hold the *fascēs* (q.v.) and was accompanied by 12 lictors (q.v.). In practice this alternate power-sharing was confused by the consul's military duties, especially in times of war, when both might be in the field with their legions at the same time. The extension of consular *imperium* was called prorogation and introduced in 326 BC to enable the retiring consul to complete a military campaign as proconsul (*lit.* "in place of a consul"). This promagistracy was sometime extended to praetors (q.v.), who became propraeors, and this practice was increased during the imperial era, otherwise there would not have been enough men to manage the increased number of provinces. There was a proper age for a consul (42 after the first century BC), but this was increasingly ignored, as was the tradition that a consul should only serve once in his lifetime (*see also* *cursus honorum*). The nature of the consulship changed under the principate. Augustus introduced an abbreviated consulship of six months. After AD 69 it became normal for three, sometimes more, pairs of consuls to hold office in the same year. The pair that assumed

office on January 1 were called *consules ordinarii* (ordinaries), and gave their names to the year. The later two consuls were called *consules suffecti* (suffect). In 190, under the emperor Commodus, the system reached its most extreme when 25 men held the consulship during the year. Modern usage is consulship, not consulate, as the latter is a diplomatic institution.

consular The title given to a man who has been a consul; similarly for proconsular.

corona civica Civic crown; awarded to a soldier for saving the lives of fellow soldiers or capturing enemy ground and holding it until the end of a battle. The crown was made from oak leaves, which were later rendered in gold for victorious emperors as a sign of supreme *imperium* (q.v.).

cura, curatores Boards; Augustus established boards to take over the functions of many Republican magistracies, among them *curatores viarum* (keepers of roads), *curatores operis publicorum* (public works) and *curatores aquarum* (water supply). *Curatores* is also synonymous with “commissioners,” especially in connection with financial administration, such as developed by Trajan at the end of the first century AD.

curia, curiae One of the 30 most ancient Roman clan divisions. The *curiae* gathered in a meeting hall (a *curia*) headed by a chief elected for life called a *curio*. The word eventually came to mean the hall itself rather than the meeting. Legal enactments, *lex curiata*, had fallen into disuse by the end of the Republic, other than for the adoption of a patrician into a plebeian family or the conferring of *imperium* on a senior magistrate, when the 30 original *curiae* were represented by the 30 lictors. Under the principate even this fell into disuse.

Curia Hostilia The senate house, thought to have been built originally by King Tullus Hostilius.

cursus honorum *lit.* “way of honor.” The political route to becoming a consul. This was senator (aged 30), quaestor, and praetor. The ranks of aedile (q.v.) and *tribunus plebis* (q.v.) were not a legal part of the *cursus honorum*, but most candidates found it useful to serve in one or more of these capacities to attract electoral attention.

cursus publicus *lit.* “public way,” this referred to the Roman postal system created by Augustus, a complex of way-stations along the numerous highways where couriers changed a tired horse for a fresh one and thus moved dispatches at great speed from one point to

another. The *cursus publicus* was also synonymous with espionage, since its officers, frequently recruited from among the *speculatores* and *frumentarii* (q.v.), were well placed in their traveling to make reports to the emperor on all aspects of his dominions.

damnatio memoriae *lit.* “damnation of the memory,” the term applied to those whose names after death were to be erased from the public record.

decennalia tenth anniversary (*vicennalia*, twentieth anniversary).

delator, delatores *lit.* “denouncer,” men employed to uncover treason and bring the guilty party to court. They were universally loathed because many emperors used *delatores* to bring false charges against wealthy citizens with a view to confiscating their estates; synonymous with *frumentarii* (q.v.).

dictator *lit.* “one who speaks.” In times of extreme danger to the state the active consul with the senate’s approval could appoint a man of consular rank (often himself) dictator, also known as *magister populi*, master of the infantry—*populus* meaning those eligible to be soldiers. The period was for a maximum of six months, and he held supreme military and judicial authority, although other magistrates remained in office. The dictator appointed a *magister equitum* (q.v.) to be his second-in-command. The dictator received special indemnity so that when he stepped down he could not be held liable to prosecution for the consequences of any of his actions. The dictatorship was abolished after Caesar’s murder in 44 BC.

dies imperii The date counted by an emperor as that of his accession, which was not necessarily the same as the date on which his powers were conferred by the senate.

domus A city or town house as distinct from an apartment (*insula*) (q.v.) or country villa.

Domus Publicus A house owned by the state, usually given to senior priests as part of their remuneration.

dux, duces *lit.* “he [who] leads,” commander of a cavalry unit in the reorganized army of Constantine. The term had probably come into common currency earlier, but Constantine gave it official status as a title. A *dux* may have been a relatively minor military officer or as distinguished as a *comes* (q.v.). We derive the modern word “duke” from it.

Edictum, edicta Edict. Associated with the application of the law. The *edictum praetoris* (praetor’s edict) was declared annually by each newly

elected *praetor urbanus*, which basically laid out the legal principles he would follow when making judgments in a court. He had the discretion to amend his predecessor's *edicta* and often failed to follow his own. In the imperial era, the praetor's edict was revised to become the *edictum perpetuum*, implying that an emperor's judicial decisions would remain perpetually in force.

emporium A large waterfront building where importers and exporters had their offices; or a whole seaport concerned with maritime trade.

eques, equites *lit.* a "horseman," from the Latin for horse (*equus*); its nearest modern equivalent is "knight." In the early Republic members of the *Ordo Equester* (Equestrian Order) were, by possessing sufficient wealth to own at least one horse, Rome's elite non-senatorial citizens, at which time there were about 1,800 *equites*. By the second century BC, this had become a social class distinction with little military connection, since Rome's cavalry was recruited from among the allies. Under the early empire the *equites* came to represent the burgeoning middle class (senators were not allowed to earn money through trade), and eventually the core from which emperors selected their civil servants. There were several important offices usually the preserve of equestrians, the most distinguished being the *praefectus praetorio* (q.v.).

Equites Comites (Augusti) Diocletian's title for the elite cavalry arm formerly referred to as the *equites singulares Augusti*, probably formed by the Flavians, when they had a strength of between 500–1,000 men recruited from the *auxilia* (q.v., *also see* *alae*).

Equites Promoti Another elite cavalry arm created by Diocletian, so named because it was comprised of horsemen "promoted" from barbarian tribes.

excubitorii *lit.* "sentinels," an imperial bodyguard formed by Leo I which pointedly excluded Germans from among its number.

fascēs Originally an emblem of the Etruscan kings, these were bundles of birch rods tied with red leather thongs and each carried by a lictor (q.v.) to precede a magistrate with *imperium*. Within Rome's *pomerium* (q.v.) only the rods were carried as a symbol that the magistrate had the right to chastise, but outside an ax was inserted to indicate he had the right to execute offenders. A curule aedile had two fascēs, a praetor six, a consul 12, and a dictator 24.

fiscus *see* *aerarium*

flame, flamines A priest who served Rome's most ancient and most

Roman deities. The most senior was the *Flamen Dialis*, who served Jupiter.

flumen A river.

foederatus, foederati Derives from *foedus*, a treaty that established a peaceful alliance between Rome and another state in perpetuity. The term came to have a concrete meaning toward the end of the fourth century AD when it applied to the Visigoths who were allowed to settle in great numbers in the Balkans and were expected to supply whole armies to the Romans in return.

forum, fora An open-air meeting place. The most famous is the Forum Romanum. Other *fora* originally had specific purposes. The Forum Boarium (*boarium* means “cattle”) was the beef market. A *forum castrum* was the meeting place in a Roman military camp. The Forum Frumentarium was a fruit market, Forum Holitorium a vegetable market, Forum Piscinum a fish market.

frumentarii Army quartermasters whose duties included the purchase and distribution of grain were called *frumentarii*. Because they constantly traveled on logistical assignments, the *frumentarii* were in a position to watch over the army, imperial bureaucracy, and local population, and report back to the emperor. Caracalla, among other emperors, used the *frumentarii* as spies and they began to replace the *speculatores*, the agents of men like Julius Caesar. Constantine replaced the *frumentarii* with the *schola agentium in rebus* (see *schola*).

gens, gentes A family (eg. Aemilius Aemilii, Cornelius Cornelii, or Julius Julii).

Hispania Spain; in the late Republic the Romans held sway over two provinces, Hispania Citerior (Nearer Spain) and Hispania Ulterior (Further Spain). The northwestern corner remained beyond Roman hegemony until the time of Augustus, after which the territory was divided into three provinces: Tarraconensis, Baetica, and Lusitania, corresponding roughly to northern Portugal-Castile-León-Aragon, Andalucia, and southern Portugal. Under Diocletian it was combined with Mauretania Tingitana (Morocco) as the diocese Hispaniae (lit. “The Spains”).

imperator Originally “commander-in-chief” or “general” but later a title given by his soldiers to a successful general after a victory but who had not yet entered Rome to celebrate a triumph. With the advent of the principate, Augustus appropriated the right to celebrate a triumph to himself, and by the time of Vespasian it was synonymous

with “emperor,” the modern word being derived from *imperator*.

imperium The degree of authority invested in a curule magistrate (see *sella curulis*). A man with *imperium* could exercise the power of his office freely without objection so long as he remained within the laws governing the position. He was preceded by lictors bearing the *fasces* (q.v.). There were degrees of *imperium*, Germanicus was sent to Syria with a *maius imperium*, implying a “bigger” degree of authority than any other with *imperium* except the emperor.

insula, insulae lit. “island,” the word was also used to describe the tall apartment blocks in Rome and in other Roman cities.

interregnum lit. “between kings,” the term came to mean the period of time between the death or deposition of one emperor and the accession of another.

iugerum, iugera The basic Roman unit of land measurement, approximately equal to half an acre.

latifundium, latifundia lit. “spacious farm” (from Latin *latus* and *fundus*) were the great agricultural estates owned by wealthy senators. In theory, senators were disallowed from earning money through any form of commerce other than from farming. The growth of *latifundia* during the last century BC drove small farmers off their lands and into the city of Rome.

legatus, legati Legate; originally senior officers of a general’s staff, who had to be of senatorial rank to qualify. Augustus appointed senators of consular rank as *legati Augusti propraetore* to govern his imperial provinces (except Egypt, which had an equestrian *praefectus Aegypti*). In the early imperial period each legion stationed in an imperial province was commanded by a *legatus legionis*, a man of senatorial rank. The Severans began to divorce military posts from senators, and by the time of Diocletian all military officers were equestrians and the term had fallen into disuse.

lex, leges Latin for “law.” In the Republic a *lex* was decreed by the *Comitia Centuriata* (see *comitia*) and only became valid when its terms had been inscribed on bronze or stone, which is why so many, even in fragments, have survived. Under the principate the right of passing *leges* was abrogated by the emperor (see also *plebiscitum* and *senate*).

libellus, libelli lit. “little book,” it also meant a form of judicial paperwork certifying that its bearer had sworn an oath. Under Decius, *libelli* were issued to Christians who had recanted.

lictor, lictores A public servant who carried the *fasces* (q.v.) and

accompanied a magistrate holding *imperium*. By imperial times there were some 300.

limes, limites Originally a Roman surveyor's term for the path(s) that marked the boundaries of centuriated land and gave access between the plots. Later it described the military roads that penetrated enemy territory and, as forts and even walls and ditches were added, the entire defensive structure of a frontier boundary.

limitanei Permanent frontier garrisons so called because they occupied stations on the *limites* (q.v.).

litus A coast (Litus Saxonicum, Saxon Coast).

macellum An open-air market with booths (originally for butchers). The Roman fora started out this way, but were distinguished by the buildings that sprang up around them, whereas the *macellum* remained a simple market space.

magister, magistri *lit.* "master," from which we derive the word "magistrate." During the Republic he was an elected executive of the senate and people. The hierarchy went: *tribunus militum*, quaestor, *tribunus plebis*, plebeian aedile, curule aedile (all q.v.), praetor, consul. In times of emergency the senate was allowed to appoint an extraordinary *magister* called a dictator (q.v.). By the end of the third century the term was applied to many military and administrative functionaries.

magister equitum Master of the horse. In the middle and late Republic this office held great *imperium*, since a *magister equitum* was appointed only by a dictator (q.v.) as his second-in-command. By the end of the third century the office had declined somewhat in prestige, and Constantine made the rank subordinate to the *magister militum* (q.v.). After this point each military province might expect to have its own *magister equitum* in command of the cavalry, an equal colleague to the *magister peditum* (q.v.).

magister memoriae, epistularum, libellorum (*see* scrinia).

magister militum Master of military. This office was created by Constantine to take overall command of an army in the absence of either an Augustus or a Caesar. Their immediate subordinates were the *magister equitum* (q.v.) and *magister peditum* (q.v.).

magister officiorum Master of offices (civil service). Another of Constantine's creations, he was the chief of the government departments and a permanent member of the emperor's *sacrum consistorium* (*see* consilium). He was assigned a number of the

functions previously the preserve of the *praefectus praetorio* (q.v.). He commanded the *scholae palatinae* (see schola); he held a general direction over the provision of arms to the military; he was minister for foreign affairs; he commanded the newly formed *schola agentium in rebus* (see schola) which had replaced the *frumentarii* (q.v.) to act as dispatch-bearers, supervise the transport of troops, and act as spies. With these duties, the *magister officiorum* became the most powerful man in the empire after the emperor.

magister peditum Master of foot (infantry). Unlike the *magister equitum* (q.v.), this was a new post created by Constantine. Although theoretically equal to the *magister equitum*, the greater reliance on cavalry in the later empire meant that infantry commanders were less regarded in the military hierarchy.

magister populi (see dictator)

magister praesentalis Commander of the entire field army in the very late empire, e.g. Stilicho.

magister utriusque militiae Commander of both arms of the army, cavalry and infantry, ie synonymous with *magistri equitum et peditum*.

manumission lit. “send from the hand,” giving a slave his freedom.

mare Sea (see also oceanus, pontus, sinus)

minim A red pigment that triumphant generals painted on their faces, apparently to look like the terracotta statue of Jupiter Optimus Maximus.

mob, the A convenient appellation for what was known in the Republic as *capite censi* (head count), those who were too poor to belong to one of the Five Classes; also known as *proletarii* because they were too poor to contribute anything to the state except *proles* (children). A dispossessed *adsidui* (q.v.) could fall into this *infra classem* (beneath the classes) position. In the late Republic and early imperial periods, this increasingly overwhelming, unstable and frequently riotous section of the Roman populace was only controlled through the cheap or even free distribution of grain or bread, the so-called corn dole, and plenty of free, lavish entertainment.

modius, *modii* The Roman basic measure of grain, weighing approximately 13 pounds (5.9 kg).

municipium, *municipia* The title originally given to Italian towns whose inhabitants had been granted Roman “half” citizenship (*civitas sine suffragio*, citizenship without suffrage), which meant they had all the obligations (taxes, etc.) of citizenship without the right to vote.

This meant that a *municipium* had a lower status than a *colonia* (q.v.) In the early first century BC citizens of Italian *municipia* became full citizens (*civitas optimo iure*). As the empire expanded municipal charters were granted to towns outside Italy whose inhabitants were not Roman citizens. However, the rights of citizenship were usually only given to the local aristocracy, magistrates, and town councilors until Caracalla's *Constitutio Antoniniana* (212) gave citizenship to all free men.

nobilis Nobility, the term that described a man of consular rank and his descendants. It was coined by plebeians after they were permitted to the consulship to reduce the distinction of being a patrician by birth.

nomen, nomina Family name or *gens* (q.v.).

notarius, notarii (*see schola*)

novella, novellae An amendment or addition to an existing law.

oceanus A sea without perceivable end.

oppidum A Celtic (Gaulish) hill fort or fortified settlement.

Optimates Senatorial political party of conservatives during the late Republic. They placed the rule of the senate above all other forms of government. Its members were also known as the *Boni* (q.v.).

ordo Order, a social grouping with a similar family background and amount of wealth. The best known is the *Ordo Equester* (*see eques*).

palatium *see comitatus*.

pantheon The array of all Roman gods.

patronus Patron, a man of rank who held the allegiance of *clientes* (q.v.) in return for favors of money, legal assistance, or political promotion opportunities.

patrician The Roman aristocracy from the archaic period. They lost their special rights as plebeian power increased, and by the later Republic were frequently genteelly impoverished. By the end of Nero's reign the patricians had all been wiped out. In the mid-fifth century the term was reintroduced to mean "father of the emperor"—not to be taken literally since it was more equivalent to "protector of the emperor," or first minister.

pilum, pilae The Roman infantry spear introduced by Marius with a barbed iron head. A contrived weakness where the shaft joined the head meant it would break on contact, rendering the weapon useless to the enemy but easily repairable by Roman armorers.

plebeian, plebs Any Roman citizen of one of the Five Classes who was not of patrician rank. Originally the plebs were forbidden election to any magisterial post, but this changed rapidly during the Republican period until plebs occupied almost all senior posts.

plebiscitum, plebiscita A plebiscite enacted in the *Comitia Plebis Tributa* (see comitia) had the same force of law as a *lex* passed by the *Comitia Centuriata*. Originally a plebiscite was separately distinguished from a law, but later the two merged in the records, and all were called a *lex*.

pomerium The sacred boundary of the city of Rome. In the religious sense, Rome existed within the boundary and everything outside it was Roman territory. The *pomerium* is said to have been created by King Servius Tullus, but it did not exactly follow the course of the Servian Wall. The *pomerium* could only be enlarged by a man who substantially increased the size of Roman territory, as Augustus did considerably.

pontifex A priest, which may have been derived from the notion that a *pontifex* was a bridge builder—bridges (*pons*, *pontes*) being considered structures with magical or mysterious properties.

Pontifex Maximus The most senior of all Roman priests, who supervised the members of the various priestly *collegia*. The ancient kings held the title *Rex Sacrorum* (holy king). Despite the universal loathing of the kings, the young Republic kept the title because it was sacred, but created the *Pontifex Maximus* to be superior. The *Pontifex Maximus* was elected, which made him a statesman and head of the state religion.

pontus an enclosed sea, such as the Black Sea (Pontus Euxinus).

Populares The political party of radical reformers during the late Republic that believed in legislation through the force of popular (public) will rather than that of the senate. Julius Caesar was one of the party's luminaries.

porta A gateway, usually in a defensive wall.

porticus A colonnade with a roof above, either as a straight arcade or enclosing a square (*peristylus*). Porticoes were frequently used as places of business and for meetings of the senate.

praefectus fabrum *lit.* “prefect of making” (quartermaster in modern parlance). He was responsible for every aspect of supplying and maintaining the Roman armies, although usually a civilian not a soldier. Like his modern counterpart he was able to enrich himself

through the lucrative contracts he handled (*see also* *frumentarii*).

praefectus praetorio, *praefecti* Commander(s) of the *cohortes praetorio* (q.v.). With some exceptions, it was the custom to appoint two in joint-command. The office was the most distinguished rank an *eques* (q.v.) could aspire to, and many praetorian prefects were in a position to affect the accession of an emperor. Hadrian altered the prefect's status, making him a judicial administrator, while Diocletian appointed four prefects, one for each tetrarch, to take supreme command of the military in each division of the empire, but limited the power of each by giving his second-in-command, the *vicarius* (q.v.), direct access to himself.

praefectus urbi *see* *cohortes urbanae*

praefectus vigilum *see* *vigiles*

praenomen, *praenomina* The first or given name of a Roman man. There were not many in use, which complicates distinguishing between members of the same gens or family, hence the importance of the *cognomen* (q.v.) or nickname.

praeses, *praesides* Under the Severan dynasty in some provinces the title of governor was no longer *procurator* (q.v.), but *procurator agens vices praesides*, or just simply *praeses*. Although an equestrian rank, in the reign of Caracalla *praesides* became recognized as the appellation for all governors, both of senatorial and imperial provinces. Diocletian also used the term, when every province except Africa Proconsularis and Asia were governed by *praesides*. These had consular governors reporting directly to the emperor.

praetor lit. 'one who leads'. The second most senior rung on the *cursus honorum* (q.v.) of magistrates. Originally, it was the highest rank until the Republic introduced the consuls. At first there were two, the *praetor urbanus* administered laws in the city of Rome, and the *praetor peregrinus*, administered lawsuits concerning foreigners at Rome, and was also in charge of supervising the games. With acquisition of overseas territories, the number increased to four and then six praetors.

primicerius domesticorum Commander of the *scholae palatinae* (*see* *schola*) in Constantine's reign and thereafter.

potestas tribunicia *see* *tribunus plebis*

praepositus sacri cubiculi A eunuch officer whose duties were looking after the emperor's bedchamber, a position first created by Diocletian. In time he ranked with highest officials in the empire, with control of

the imperial wardrobe (*sacra vestis*), the *primicerius sacri cubiculi*, who was the emperor's personal equerry, and the *silentarii* (q.v.).

praetorian guard *see* *cohortes praetorio*

princeps The "first citizen," a title assumed by Augustus. Previously, the *princeps senatus* was the chosen leader of the senate, but in the imperial period the simpler *princeps* was used to describe the emperor, hence the use of the word "principate" to describe the early imperial era. The modern word "prince" is derived from it.

privatus, privati *lit.* "private person," a citizen or military person holding no magisterial or imperial rank.

procurator An agent or, in legal proceedings, representative. Under the principate the term came to mean an employee of the emperor in the civil service, and procurators fulfilled a wide range of duties from legal to fiscal. They may have been men of the emperor's own household, probably freedmen, but were more usually *equites* (q.v.).

propraetor (see *consul*)

pulvinator The imperial box at the theater, amphitheater, or circus; derived from *pulvinar*, a cushioned couch on which offerings were left to the gods in front of a temple.

quadriga A four-horse chariot.

quaestor Lowest rung on the *cursus honorum* (q.v.), and generally a fiscal role (treasury, port customs, provincial finances). Quaestors were regularly attached to a propraetor or proconsul's provincial administration.

Quattuorviri Consulares The four "circuit judges" appointed by Hadrian to see that the law was efficiently administered in Italy, and to relieve citizens of the previous necessity of bringing appeals to Rome for judgment. Because their appointment appeared to downgrade the status of Italy to a mere province, they were unpopular among senators.

res publica *lit.* "thing" or "affair of the public." A republic is a government that constitutes the people as a whole and describes the Roman constitution after the abolition of the kings.

rex king

saepta *lit.* "sheepfold," which describes the way the open space on the Campus Martius was divided by temporary fences (sheep pens) so that the Five Classes could vote in their centuries at an assembly. Buildings such as the Saepta Julia borrowed the term.

Scrinia lit. "file holder." The term described the administrative bureau of Constantine and refers to the fact that the actual files were dragged around with the *comitatus* (q.v.). There were three departments in the *Scrinia*, controlled by the *magister memoriae* (issuer of imperial memoranda in response to petitions), the *magister epistularum* (letter-writing and dealing with embassies), and the *magister libellorum* (petitions and judicial matters). Time has obscured how these various functions actually worked or the real scope of their duties.

sella curulis The ivory chair reserved for the exclusive use of *magistri* (q.v.) with *imperium* (q.v.); a curule aedile sat in one, but a plebeian aedile did not. Praetors and consuls used curule chairs.

senate; *senatus populusque Romanus* (S.P.Q.R.) was the Senate and People of Rome. Originally an advisory council of 100 patricians under the kings, the senate expanded to 300 patricians at the start of the Republic. By the middle Republic plebeians had earned the right to be senators. At first entry was adlection (q.v.) by the censors (q.v.), but by the middle Republic admittance was automatically given for life once a man had been elected by his *comitia* (q.v.) to his first magistracy. It had its own meeting house, the Curia Hostilia (later replaced by Julius Caesar and refurbished by Diocletian), but frequently met in temples and other sites such as the Porticoes of Pompey, where Julius Caesar was murdered. Its permanent chief was the senior patrician, the *princeps senatus*. The senate remained an advisory body in the Republic, never empowered to make laws, only recommend them to the *comitia* (see *senatus consultum*). Augustus amended the body's powers to include law-making, but later emperors severely reduced the senate's prerogatives and gave many senatorial offices to those of equestrian rank.

senatus consultum Resolutions of the senate passed to magistrates and the *comitiae* as recommendations for the promulgation of a *lex* (q.v.) or *plebiscitum* (q.v.). In the late Republic they were rarely ignored and therefore acquired the force of law. In the principate many emperors preferred to issue their legislation in the form of *senatus consulta* rather than their own *edicta in perpetuum*, which perpetuated the fabrication that it was actually the senate passing the laws.

schola Originally the meeting place near the main gate of a Roman army camp for the first cohorts of the legion. During the reign of Septimius Severus *scholae* came to mean the clubs formed by junior officers of a legion. Apart from providing social amenities, these clubs were insurance societies. In return for regular contributions of pay, if

a soldier was discharged or fell ill he received a lump sum from the society's bank, which was controlled by a quaestor (q.v.). By the time of Constantine the name had come to refer to the crack cavalry units which were housed in instant readiness near the camp's main gate. Constantine replaced the *cohortes praetorio* (q.v.) with the *scholae palatinae*, under the overall command of the *magister officiorum* (q.v.). Each *schola* numbered 500 cavalrymen recruited from Germania, and they were better paid and equipped than the cavalry of the field army. The *schola agentium in rebus* replaced the *frumentarii* (q.v.) as dispatch-bearers, logistics supervisors, and spies. The *schola notariorum* was composed of men with the rank of *tribunus*. These *notarii* acted as secretaries to the *sacrum consistorium* (see *consilium*), emissaries to the provinces, and drew up letters of patent for lower military ranks. They also kept a register containing the names of the higher state officials called the *laterculum maius*.

silentarii A body of thirty men responsible for maintaining quiet and decorum in the court of Diocletian and onward (especially in the East).

sinus In the geographical context, a gulf, such as Sinus Ligurius (the Gulf of Genoa).

suffect consul (see *consul*)

therma, thermae The public baths of Roman cities; a private bath was called a *balineum*.

toga Made from a single piece of lightweight woolen cloth, only a full citizen of Rome was permitted to wear the toga. Its extreme length (about 15 feet, 4.6m) and the complex of folds it created when draped makes it unlikely that a togate man wore anything else under it. There were several types of toga: *toga alba*, ordinary white garment; *toga candida*, specially whitened to look smart when canvassing for election; *toga picta*, all purple for triumphing generals; *toga praetexta*, purple-bordered for curule magistrates; *toga pulla*, black mourning toga; *toga trabea*, particolored in strips for augurs; *toga virilis*, toga of manhood, actually a *toga alba*.

Transtiberim *lit.* "across the Tiber," the district on the opposite bank of the Tiber from the city of Rome. Modern-day Trastevere.

tribunus militum Each of the middle officers in the chain of command of a Roman army was classed as a military tribune.

tribunus plebis Tribune of the plebs; originally a man representing one of the three (*tres*) Roman *tribus* (tribes). The three were the Luceres,

Ramnes, and Tities. The magistracy came into being in the early Republic when the plebeians were confronting the power of the patricians. Elected by the *Comitia Plebis Tributa* (see *comitia*), *tribuni* swore an oath to defend lives and property of the plebs. The office held no *imperium* (q.v.) but the *potestas tribunicia* (tribunician power) gave them the right to exercise a veto against the actions of any other magistrate, or the holding of an election, or the passing of a law or plebiscite, or decrees of the senate, even in war or foreign affairs. Only a dictator was above the tribunician veto. This was the power that, when it was vested in Augustus, made him the absolute ruler of the empire; soon thereafter the office fell into disuse.

vexillum Flag or banner. In the Republic it was the standard of the legionary cavalry. The standard bearer was called the *vexillarius*. It also came to represent a detached unit (*vexillatio*) and so eventually to mean the unit itself (see next entry).

vexillationes Originally a detachment of Roman infantry, in the later empire it came to mean units of cavalry (implying how more important mounted soldiers had become).

via A road or main highway.

vicarius, vicarii Originally a substitute for a procurator (q.v.), or equestrian provincial governor, generally when the procurator was forced to be absent from his province. Under the Severan dynasty equestrian *vicarii* were more frequently appointed as governors in their own right. Diocletian's twelve dioceses of the empire were largely administered by *vicarii*, who reported to one of the four *praefecti praetorio* of the tetrarchs. However, they had the right of direct access to the senior Augustus, which was an effective check and balance to the enormous power wielded by the prefects. The modern word "vicar" (and still associated with a diocese) is derived from it.

vigiles The third of Rome's garrison after the *cohortes praetorio* and *urbanae*, the *vigiles* formed a permanent fire brigade, first established by Augustus. Each of the seven cohorts was commanded by a *tribunus* under the equestrian *praefectus vigilum*. In addition to fire-fighting, they acted as the city's night watch; there was also a detachment stationed at Ostia.

vigintivirate Although not an official step in the *cursus honorum* (q.v.), this post was a useful entry point, and loosely translates as "the twenty," since this body of government officers consisted of 20 men, the *vigintiviri*. Their duties, usually under the supervision of an aedile (q.v.), split into four categories: ten assigned to the courts; four to

look after Rome's streets; three in charge of criminal trials; three, called moneyers, to attend to the coinage.

viri Generic title for the most distinguished officers of the later empire. There were generally four classes: *vir clarissimus* (most distinguished gentleman), a senatorial officer; *vir eminentissimus* (eminent gentleman) belongs only to an equestrian prefect; *vir egregius* (honorable gentleman), an equestrian in the civil service; *vir perfectissimus* (most perfect gentleman) other prefects and procurators.

TABLE OF EMPERORS

Julio–Claudian dynasty

27 BC–AD 14 Augustus

14–37 Tiberius

37–41 Gaius Caligula

41–54 Claudius

54–68 Nero

Year of the Four Emperors

68–69 Galba

69–69 Otho

69–69 Vitellius

Flavian dynasty

69–79 Vespasian

79–81 Titus

81–96 Domitian

Nervo–Trajanic and Antonine dynasties

096–098 Nerva

097–117 Trajan (97–98 with Nerva)

117–138 Hadrian

139–161 Antoninus Pius

161–169 Lucius Verus (with Marcus Aurelius)

161–180 Marcus Aurelius

180–192 Commodus

Emperors of the civil war and the Severan dynasty

193–193 Pertinax

193–193 Didius Julianus

193–211 Septimius Severus

211–212 Geta (with Caracalla)

211–217 Caracalla

217–218 Macrinus

218–218 Diadumenian (with Macrinus)

218–222 Elagabalus

222–235 Severus Alexander

Period of Military Anarchy and civil disorder

235–238 Maximinus Thrax
238–238 Gordian I and II (in Africa)
238–238 Balbinus & Pupienus (In Italy)
238–244 Gordian III
244–249 Philip the Arab
247–249 Philip II
249–251 Decius
251–253 Trebonianus Gallus
251–253 Volusian (with Trebonianus Gallus)
251–251 Hostilian (with Trebonianus Gallus)
253–253 Aemilianus
253–260 Valerian
253–268 Gallienus
Recovery of the empire
268–270 Claudius II Gothicus
270–270 Quintillus
270–275 Aurelian
275–276 Tacitus
276–282 Probus
282–283 Carus
283–284 Carinus and Numerian
The Tetrarchy and House of Constantine
(West / East)
287–305 Maximian Aug. / 284–305 Diocletian Aug.
293–305 Constantius Caes. / 293–305 Galerius Caes.
305–306 Constantius Aug. / 305–11 Galerius Aug.
305–306 Severus II Caes. / 305–09 Maximinus Daia Caes.
306–307 Severus II Aug. / 309–13 Maximinus Daia Aug.
306–312 Maxentius (in Italia with Maxentius reinstated 307–08)
306–307 Constantine Caes.
307–324 Constantine Aug. (joint) / 308–324 Licinus Aug.
324–337 Constantine Aug. (sole ruler)
337–340 Constantine II Aug. / 337–61 Constantius II Aug.
337–350 Constans Aug.

351–354 Gallus Caes. (with Constantius II)

355–361 Julian Caes. (with Constantius II, Aug. from 360)

361–363 Julian Aug. (sole ruler)

363–364 Jovian Aug. (sole ruler)

Valentinian and Theodosian dynasty

364–375 Valentinian Aug. / 364–78 / Valens Aug.

375–383 Gratian Aug.

375–392 Valentinian II Aug. (Italia) / 379–92 Theodosius Aug.

392–395 Theodosius Aug. (sole ruler)

395–423 Honorius (with Arcadius)

408–411 Constantine III co-Aug. from 409)

421–421 Constantius III (with Honorius)

423–425 Joannes (usurper)

425–455 Valentinian III

Fall of the West / Eastern empire

455–455 Petronius Maximus

455–456 Avitus

457–461 Majorian

461–465 Libius Severus

467–472 Anthemius

472–472 Olybrius

473–473 Glycerius

473–475 Julius Nepos

475–476 Romulus Augustulus

Barbarian kings of Italy

476–493 Odoacer

493–526 Theodoric

526–534 Athalaric

534–536 Theodahad

536–540 Witigis

540–541 Hildebad

541–552 Totila

552–553 Teias

Eastern empire / Byzantium

395–408 Arcadius

408–450 Theodosius II

450–457 Marcian

457–744 Leo I

474–474 Leo II (with father Zeno)

474–475 and 477–491 Zeno (475–477 Basiliscus)

491–518 Anastasius

518–527 Justin I

527–565 Justinian

Popes of Rome

(excluding anti-Popes, earliest dates are approximate)

d.ad 64 St. Peter

66–68 St. Linus

79–91 St. Anacetus

91–101 St. Clement I

100–101 St. Evaristus I

109–116 St. Alexander I

116–125 St. Sixtus I

125–136 St. Telesphorus

138–142 St. Hyginus

142–155 St. Pius I

155–166 St. Anicetus

166–174 St. Soter

174–189 St. Eleutherius

189–198 St. Victor I

198–217 St. Zephyrinus

217–222 St. Callistus I

222–230 St. Urban I

230–235 St. Pontian I

235–236 St. Anterus

236–250 St. Fabian

251–253 St. Cornelius

253–254 St. Lucius I

254–257 St. Stephen I

257–258 St. Sixtus II

260–268 St. Dionysius

269–274 St. Felix I

275–283 St. Eutychian

283–296 St. Gaius

296–304 St. Marcellinus

306–208 St. Marcellus I

310–310 St. Eusebius

311–314 St. Miltiades

314–335 St. Silvester I
336–337 St. Mark
337–352 St. Julius I
352–366 Liberius
366–384 St. Damasus I
384–399 St. Siricius
399–401 St. Anastasius I
401–417 St. Innocent I
417–418 St. Zosimus
418–422 St. Boniface I
422–432 St. Celestine I
432–440 St. Sixtus III
440–461 St. Leo I the Great
461–468 St. Hilarius I
468–483 St. Smplicius I
483–492 St. Felix III (II)
492–496 St. Gelasius I
496–498 Anastasius II
498–514 St. Symmachus
514–523 St. Hormisdas
523–526 St. John I
526–530 Felix IV (III)
530–532 Boniface II
533–535 John II
535–536 St. Agapitus I
536–537 St. Silverius
537–555 Vigilius
556–561 Pelagius I
561–574 John III

Patriarchs of Constantinople

038–054 Stachys the Apostle

054–068 Onesimus

069–089 Polycarpus I

089–105 Plutarch

105–114 Sedecion

114–129 Diogenes

129–136 Eleutherius

136–141 Felix

141–144 Polycarpus II

144–148 Athendodorus

148–154 Euzois

154–166 Laurence

166–169 Alypius

169–187 Pertinax

187–198 Olympianus

198–211 Mark I

211–217 Philadelphus

217–230 Ciriacus I

230–237 Castinus

237–242 Eugenius I

242–272 Titus

272–284 Dometius

284–293 Rufinus I

293–306 Probus

306–314 Metrophanes

314–337 Alexander

337–339 Paul I (341–42; 346–51)

339–341 Eusebius of Nicomedia

342–346 Macedonius I (351–60)

360–370 Eudoxius of Antioch

370–379 Demophilus

379–379 Euagrius

380–380 Maximus

379–381 Gregory I the Theologian

381–397 Nectarius

398–404 John I Chrysostom

404–405 Arsacius of Tarsus

406–425 Atticus

426–427 Sisinius I

428–431 Nestorius

431–434 Maximianus

434–446 Proclus

446–449 Phlavianus

449–458 Anatolius

458–471 Gennadius I

471–488 Acacius

488–489 Phrabbas

489–495 Euphemius

495–511 Macedonius II

511–518 Timotheus I

518–520 John II of Cappadocia

520–535 Epiphanius

535–536 Anthimus I

536–552 Menas

552–565 Eutychius (577–582)

Patriarchs of Alexandria

043–063 Mark the Evangelist

061–082 Anianus

083–095 Avilius

096–106 Kedron

106–118 Primus

118–129 Justus

131–141 Eumenes

142–152 Mark II

152–166 Celadion

167–178 Agrippinus

178–189 Julian

189–232 Demetrius
232–248 Heraclas
248–264 Dionysius
265–282 Maximus
282–300 Theonas
300–311 Peter I
312–313 Achillas
313–328 Alexander I
328–339 Athanasius I (346–373)
339–346 Gregory of Cappadocia
373–380 Peter II
380–385 Timothy I
385–412 Theophilus I
412–444 Cyril I
444–451 Dioscorus I
452–457 Proterius
457–460 Timothy II Ailouros (Weasel)
477–477 Peter III
477–482 Timothy III
482–482 John I
482–489 Peter III
489–496 Athanasius II
496–505 John II
505–516 John III
516–517 Dioscorus II
517–535 Timothy IV
535–536 Theodosius
537–540 Paul
541–551 Zoilus
551–569 Apollinarius
Patriarchs of Antioch
(earliest dates are approximate)
037–053 St. Peter the Apostle
053–068 Euodius

068–107 St. Ignatius
107–127 Hero
127–154 Cornelius
154–169 Eros
169–182 Theophilus
182–191 Maximus I
191–211 Serapion
211–220 Asclepiades
220–231 Philetus
231–237 Zebinnus
237–253 Saint Babylas
253–256 Fabius
256–260 Demetrius
260–272 Paul of Samosata
268–273 Domnus I
273–282 Timaeus
283–303 Cyril
304–314 Tyrannos
314–320 Vitalis
320–323 Saint Philogonus
323–324 Paulinus of Tyre
324–337 St. Eustathius
331–333 Eulalius
333–334 Euphornius
334–342 Philaclus
342–344 Stephanus I
344–357 Leontius
358–359 Eudoxius
360–360 Euzoius
361–381 St. Meletius
381–404 Flavian I
404–412 Porphyry
412–417 Alexander
417–428 Theodotus

428–442 John I
442–449 Domnus II
449–455 Maximus II
456–458 Basil
458–461 Acacius
461–465 Martyrius
465–466 Peter the Fuller (476–88)
466–476 Julian
488–490 John II
490–495 Stephanus II
495–496 Callandion
496–498 Palladius
498–512 Flavian II
512–538 Severus of Antioch*
518–521 Paul I
521–528 Euphrosius
528–546 Ephrem of Amid

** Severus was deposed by the Greek Orthodox Church in 518; while in exile in Egypt, he was recognized by many Syriac Christians as the lawful Patriarch until his death in 538).*

INDEX OF PLACE NAMES

- Ablava—Burgh-by-Sands, England
Abusina—Eining, Germany
Ad Mediam—Mehadia, Romania
Aeduense—(*see* Dibio)
Aelia Capitolina—Jerusalem, Israel (*see also* Hierosolyma)
Aesica—Great Chesters, England
Agedincum (Senones)—Sens, France
Agrigentum—Agrigento, Sicily
Alba Pompeia—Alba, Italy
Alesia—Alise, France
Altinum—Altino, Italy
Ambianensis—(*see* Samarobriva)
Amida—Diyarbakir, Turkey
Ancyra—Ankara, Turkey
Antiochia—Antioch, Antakya, Turkey
Antium—Anzio, Italy
Apamea (Asia)—Dinar, Turkey
Apamea (Syria)—(ruin) near Qal'at al Madiq, Syria
Apulum—Alba Iulia, Romania
Aquae Mattiacae—Wiesbaden, Germany
Aquae Sextae—Aix-en-Provence, France
Aquae Sulis—Bath, England
Aquileia—Aquiuleia, Friuli, Italy
Aquileia (Raetia)—Heidenheim, Germany
Aquincum—Buda(pest), Hungary
Arae Flaviae—Rottweil, Germany
Arausio—Orange, France
Arbeia—South Shields, England
Arcidava—Varadia, Romania
Arelate—Arles, France
Argentorate—Strasbourg, France
Ariminum—Rimini, Italy
Arpinum—Arpino, Italy

Asturica Augusta—Astorga, Spain
Athenae—Athens, Greece
Augusta Praetoria—Aosta, Italy
Augusta Rauricorum/Rauraci—August, Switzerland
Augusta Taurinorum—Turin, Italy
Augusta Treverorum (Treveri)—Trier, Germany
Augusta Vindelicorum—Augsburg, Germany
Augustodunum—Autun, France
Augustodurum—Bayeux, France
Augustonemetum—Clermont-Ferrand, France
Aurelia Aquensis (Aquae)—Baden-Baden, Germany
Autessiodurum—Auxerre, France
Autricum—Chartres, France
Autunnacum—Andernach, Germany
Auximum—Osimo, Italy
Avaricum—Bourges, France
Avennio—Avignon, France
Aventicum—Avenches, Switzerland
Barbalissus—Mesken, Syria
Barcino—Barcelona, Spain
Beneventum—Benevento, Italy
Beroe (Augusta Traiana)—Stara Zagora, Bulgaria
Beroea—Veroia, Greece
Beroea (Syria)—Halab (Aleppo), Syria
Berytus—Beirut, Lebanon
Berzobis—Resita, Romania
Besontio—Besançon, France (*see also* Vesontio Sequanorum)
Bibracte—Beuvray, France
Bilitio—Bellinzona, Switzerland
Bingium—Bingen, Germany
Blatobulgium—Birrens, Scotland
Bonna—Bonn, Germany
Bononia (Felsina)—Bologna, Italy
Bononia (Gesoriacum)—Boulogne, France

Borbetomagus—Worms, Germany
Bostra—Busra, Syria
Branodunum—Brancaſter, England
Bravonium—Leintwardine, England
Brigantium—La Coruña, Spain
Brigetio—Szöny, Hungary
Brocolitia—Carrawburgh, England
Brotomagus—Brumath, Germany
Brundisium—Brindisi, Italy
Burdigala—Bordeaux, France
Byblus—Jubail, Lebanon
Byzantium (Constantinopolis)—Istanbul, Turkey
Caesaraugusta—Zaragoza, Spain
Caesarea (Cappadocia)—Kayseri, Turkey
Caesarea (Mauretania)—Cherchell, Algeria
Caesarea Maritima—Caesarea, Israel
Caesarodunum—Tours, France
Caesaromagus—Beauvais, France
Calleva Atrebatum—Silcheſter, England
Callinicum—Raqqā, Syria
Callipolis—(Gallipoli) Gelibolu, Turkey
Camboglanna—Birdoſwald, England
Camulodunum—Colcheſter, England
Capraea—Iſola Capri, Italy
Caralis—Caligari, Sardinia
Carcaso—Carcasonne, France
Carnuntum—Petronell, Austria
Carrhae—Harran, Turkey
Cartennae—Ténès, Algeria
Carthago—Carthage, Tunis
Carthago Nova—Cartagena, Spain
Castrā Batavia—Paſſau, Austria
Castrā Regina—(Ratiſbon) Regensburg, Germany
Catana—Catania, Sicily

Cauca—Coca, Spain
Cavillonum—Chalon-sur-Saône, France
Cenabum (Aureliani)—Orléans, France
Centum Putei—Sarduc, Romania
Chalcedon—Kadiköy, Turkey
Chalcis—Qinnesrin, Syria
Chrysopolis—(Scutari) Usküdar, Turkey
Cibalae—Vincovci, Croatia
Cilurnum—Chesters, England
Circesium—Buseire (Zaitha), Syria
Civitas Allsinensium—Wimpfen, Germany
Colonia Agrippina—Köln (Cologne), Germany
Concavata—Drumburg, England
Condercum—Benwell, England
Confluentes—Koblenz, Germany
Constantinopolis (Byzantium)—Istanbul, Turkey
Corduba—Cordoba, Spain
Corinimum—Cirencester, England
Corstopitum—Corbridge, England
Cosentius—Cosenza, Italy
Cularo (Gratianopolis)—Grenoble, France
Decem Pagi—Diueze, France
Dertona—Tortona, Italy
Dertosa—Tortosa, Italy
Deva—Chester, England
Dibio—Dijon, France
Divodurum (Mediomatrici)—Metz, France
Divona—Cahors, France
Dorylaeum—Eskisehir, Turkey
Drobeta—Turnu-Severin (Drobeta), Romania
Dubris—Dover, England
Dumnovaria—Dorchester, England
Durbrivae—Rochester, England
Durocatalauni—Châlons-sur-Marne, France

Durocortorum Remoroum/Remi—Reims, France

Durostorum—Silistra, Bulgaria

Dyrrachium—Durazzo (Durrës) Albania

Eburacum—York, England

Eburodunum—Yverdon, Switzerland

Edessa—Urfa, Turkey

Emona—Ljubljana, Slovenia

Emerita Augusta—Mérida, Spain

Emesa—Homs, Syria

Epiphania—Hama, Syria

Fanum Cocidi—Bewcastle, England

Fanum Fortunae—Fano, Italy

Faventia—Faenza, Italy

Firmium—Fermo, Italy

Florentia—Florence, Italy

Forum Julii—Fréjus, France

Gades—Cadiz, Spain

Genava—Geneva, Switzerland

Genua—Genoa, Italy

Gesoriacum—(see Bononia)

Glevum—Gloucester, England

Guntia—Günzburg, Germany

Hadrianopolis—Edirne (Adrianople), Turkey

Hadrumetum—Sousse, Tunisia

Halicarnassus—Bodrum, Turkey

Hatra—Al Hadr, Iraq

Heliopolis (Egypt)—buried under Cairo suburbs

Heliopolis (Syria)—Baalbek, Lebanon

Heraclea Pontica—Eregli, Turkey

Hieropolis—Membij, Turkey

Hierosolyma—Jerusalem, Israel

Hippo Regius—Annaba, Algeria

Hispalis—Seville, Spain

Hydruntum—Otranto, Italy

Iconium—Konya, Turkey
Iculsima—Angoulême, France
Imolensis—Imola, Italy
Interamna—Terni, Italy
Isca Silurum—Caerleon, Wales
Isca Dumnoniorum—Exeter, England
Italica—(ruins) near Seville, Spain
Juliomagus—Angers, France
Justiniana Prima—Caricin Grad, Serbia
Lampsacus—Lapseki, Turkey
Lanuvium—Lanuvio, Italy
Lapurdum—Bayonne, France
Lauriacum (Raetia)—Lorch, Germany
Lauriacum (Noricum)—Lorch, Austria
Lederata—Palanka, Romania
Legio—León, Spain
Lemanis—Lympne, England
Leptis Magna—(ruin), Libya
Leptis Minor—(ruin), Tunisia
Lilybaeum—Marsala, Sicily
Limonum—Poitiers, France
Lindum—Lincoln, England
Lugdunum—Lyon, France
Luguvalium—Carlisle, England
Lutetia Parisiorum—Paris, France
Magnis—Carvoran, England
Maia—Bowness, England
Malaca—Málaga, Spain
Massa Veternensis—Massa Marittima, Italy
Massilia—Marseilles, France
Mazaca—(see Caesarea, Cappadocia)
Mediolanum—Milan, Italy
Mediomatrici—Metz
Melitene—Malatya, Turkey

Messana—Messina, Sicily
Misenum—Misenio, Italy
Moguntiacum—Mainz, Germany
Mursa—Osijek, Croatia
Mursella—Petrijevci, Croatia
Mutina—Modena, Italy
Naissus—Nis, Serbia
Narbo—Narbonne, France
Nauportus—Vrhnika, Slovenia
Neapolis—Napoli (Naples), Italy
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Nemausus—Nîmes, France
Nemetæ—Speyer, Germany
Nicaea (Bithynia)—Iznik, Turkey
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Nicephorium—(*see* Callinicum)
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Pantipacaeum—Kerch, Crimea-Ukraine
Patavium—Padua, Italy
Pergamum—Bergama, Turkey
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Perusia—Perugia, Italy
Philadelphia—Amman, Jordan
Philippopolis—Plovdiv, Bulgaria
Pisae—Pisa, Italy
Placentia—Piacenza, Italy
Planasia—Isola Pianosa, Italy
Poetovio—Ptuj, Solvenia
Pola—Pula, Croatia (Istria)
Pollentia—Pollenzo, Italy
Pons Aelius—Newcastle, England
Portus Cale—Porto, Portugal
Potaissa—Turda, Romania
Praeneste—Palestrina, Italy
Ratae—Leicester, England
Rauraci—(see Augusta Rauricorum)
Reate—Riete, Italy
Remi—Reims, France
Reshapa—Risafe, Syria
Rhegium—Reggio, Italy
Rotomagus—Rouen, France
Rutupiae—Richborough, England
Salamantica—Salamanca, Spain
Saliso—Sltz, France
Salonae—Solin, Croatia
Samarobriva—Amiens, France
Samosata—Samsat, Turkey
Samun—Casei, Romania
Satala—Kelkit, Turkey
Segedunum—Wallsend, England
Segovia—Segovia, Spain

Segusio—Susa, Italy
Selymbria—Silivri, Turkey
Septem—Ceuta, Morocco
Serdica—Sofia, Bulgaria
Senones—Sens, France
Side—Selimiye, Turkey
Siga—Takembrit, Algeria
Singara—Sinjar, Iraq
Singidunum—Belgrade (Beograd), Serbia
Sirmium—Sremska Mitrovica, Serbia
Siscia—Sisak, Croatia
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Solicinium—Schwetzingen, Germany
Spalato—Split, Croatia
Submuntorium—Neuberg, Germany
Syracusae—Syracuse, Sicily
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Tarentum—Taranto, Italy
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Tarvisium—Treviso, Italy
Tentheos—Zintan, Libya
Tergeste—Trieste, Italy
Thamugadi—Timgad, Algeria
Thebae (Achaea)—Thebes, Greece
Thebae (Egypt)—Luxor (Thebes), Egypt
Thyatira—Akhisar, Turkey
Thysdrus—El-Djem, Tunisia
Tibur—Tivoli, Italy
Ticinum—Pavia, Italy
Tingi (Tingis)—Tangier, Morocco
Tinurtium—Tournus, France
Toletum—Toledo, Spain
Tolosa—Toulouse, France

Tomi—Constanta, Romania
Traiectum—Utrecht, Holland
Trapezus—Trazbon, Turkey
Tres Tabernae (Gallia)—Saverne, France
Tricasini—Troyes, France
Tridentum—Trento (Trent), Italy
Tungri—Tongeren, Belgium
Turnacum—Tournai, Belgium
Tyrus—Tyre, Sur, Lebanon
Urbium—Urbino, Italy
Uxelodunum—Stanwix, England
Valentia (Gallia)—Valence, France
Valentia (Hispania)—Valencia, Spain
Vangiones—Worms, Germany
Vectis—Isle of Wight, England
Velitrae—Vellitri, Italy
Venetia—Venice, Italy (named after the province)
Vercellae—Vercelli, Italy
Verulamium—St. Albans, England
Vesontio Sequanorum—Besançon, France (named by Julius Caesar)
Vesunna—Périgeux, France
Vetera—Xanten, Germany
Vienna—Vienne, France
Viminacium—Kostolac, Serbia
Vindobona—Vienna, Austria
Vindolanda—Chesterholm, England
Vindomara—Ebchester, England
Vindonissa—Windisch, Switzerland
Vindovala—Rudchester, England
Viroconium—Wroxeter, England
Virunum—Maria Saal (Zollfeld), Austria
Zeugma—Barak (Carchemish), Turkey

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Albis—Elbe: Germany, Czech Republic

Alutus—Olt: Romania

Anas—Guadiana: Portugal, Spain

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Araxes—Aras: Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkey

Arnus—Arno: Italy

Aternus—Pescara: Italy

Athesis—Adige: Italy

Aufidus—Ofanto: Italy

Baetis—Guadalquivir: Spain

Bagradas—Majardah: Tunisia

Bodotria—Forth: Scotland

Borysthenes—Dniepr/Dnipro: Ukraine, Belarus

Clota—Clyde: Scotland

Conouium—Conway: Wales

Danuvius—Danube: upper Balkans, Hungary, Austria, Germany (*see also* Ister)

Draco—Sarno: Italy,

Dravus—Drava: Serbia, Slovenia, Austria

Duranius—Dordogne: France

Durius—Douro/Duero: Portugal–Spain

Frigidus—Wipach/Vipava: Slovenia

Garumna—Garonne: France

Halys—Kizilirmak: Turkey

Hypanis—Southern Bug/Pivd Buh: Ukraine

Hypsus—Belice: Sicily

Iberus—Ebro: Spain

Ister—also used for the lower Danube

Ituna—Eden: England

Jordanus—Jordan: Israel

Liger—Loire: France

Liris—Liri: Italy

Matrona—Marne: France
Moenus—Main: Germany
Mosa—Maas/Meuse: Belgium–France
Mosella—Mosel/Moselle: Germany, France
Nicer—Neckar: Germany
Nilus—Nile: Egypt
Oenus—Inn: Austria
Padus—Po: Italy
Rha—Volga: Russia
Rhenus—Rhine: Netherlands, Germany–France, Switzerland
Rhodanus—Rhône: France, Switzerland
Sabrina—Severn: England
Samus—Somme: France
Sangarius—Sakaraya: Turkey
Savus—Sava: Serbia, Slovenia, Austria
Scaldus—Scheldt: Belgium
Sequana—Seine: France
Tagus—Tejo/Tagus: Portugal, Spain
Tamesis—Thames: England
Tiberis—Tiber: Italy
Ticinus—Ticino: Italy
Tinea—Tyne: England
Tisia—Tisa (Tisza): Hungary
Tyras—Dnister: Ukraine
Urbicus—Orbigo: Spain
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Viadua—Oder: Germany
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Voltumus—Calore: Italy

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Fretum Gallicum—Straits of Dover

Hellespontus—Dardanelles, Hellespont

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Lacus Benacus—Lake Garda

Lacus Venetus (*also* Brigantinus)—Lake Constance

Lacus Fucinus—Fucine Lake (drained by Claudius)

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Mare Brittanicum—English Channel

Mare Caspium—Caspian Sea

Mare Erythraeum—Red Sea

Mare Internum—Mediterranean Sea

Mare Ionium—Ionian Sea

Mare Nostrum—"Our Sea," the Mediterranean Sea

Mare Persicum—Persian Gulf

Mare Suevicum—Baltic Sea

Mare Tyrrhenum—Tyrrhenian Sea

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Oceanus Britannicus—English Channel (Republican period)

Oceanus Germanicus—North Sea

Oceanus Hibernicus—Irish Sea

Pontus Euxinus—Black Sea

Propontis—Sea of Marmara

Sinus Arabicus—Gulf of Suez/ Gulf of Aqaba
Sinus Ligusticus—(Ligurian Sea), Gulf of Genoa

BIBLIOGRAPHY

In compiling this history I have read or re-read many books on the topic, and attempted to weave a reasonable path between frequently conflicting opinions. One title in this list is not strictly speaking a history but a novel. However, Robert Graves' magnificent *Count Belisarius* deserves to be considered as historically accurate in its greater part, and the words he puts into the mouths of his characters—while obviously imagined for the sake of the tale—may well be considered as authentic as, say, those of Procopius, the recognized historian of the period. The list could be enormous; here are the titles I found most useful.

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